Medical Mystery
by SwanQueenUK

Summary

COMPLETE! SwanQueen AU: When Emma Swan rushes her sick son to hospital on New Year's Day, she has no idea what's wrong. The trouble is, neither do the doctors. Can Doctor Regina Mills diagnose Henry before it's too late? Slow burn. Rated Explicit for Chapter 20, 27, 32, 34, 36 and 40.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
A/N: Happy New Year my darlings! Let’s start 2017 off right with a new angsty SwanQueen fic. Slowburn, as always. And yes, the alliterative titles continue too.

Her fingers gripped the steering wheel, knuckles white as she carefully manoeuvred the car through the heavy city traffic. Blurred white and red lights surrounded her, rain falling from the grey sky above pounding on the windshield. Muttering under her breath, she glanced in the rear view mirror and felt tears prickle her eyes. Steeling herself, she returned her focus to the wet road as the sign for King’s College Hospital loomed ahead. Indicating, she pulled off the road and parked as close to the imposing building as she could.

Jumping out of the car, she tugged her coat more closely against her, cursing the harsh January rain and opened the rear door.

“Come on, Henry,” she murmured, wrapping her arms around the small boy whimpering on the back seat.

There was no reply as his mother lifted his trembling frame into her arms and slammed the door shut with her foot. Hurrying through the stormy weather, she reached the entrance in seconds, raindrops spattering the ground from her coat as she skidded to a stop in front of the receptionist.

“How may I help you?” asked the grey-haired woman behind the desk.

“It’s my son, he’s got a really bad fever and I think his glands are swollen. He won’t eat and he won’t sleep and -.”

“Ok, let me take a few details and I’ll get someone to see you as soon as possible,” the receptionist said, peering over her glasses at the boy sleeping restlessly in his mother’s arms. “If you can just fill this out for me Miss -?”

“Swan, Emma Swan,” the blonde said, taking the proffered form and pen. “And this is Henry.”

“Well, Emma, take a seat over there and I’ll find a nurse to come and check on Henry in a few minutes.”

Emma nodded mutely and traipsed over to a couple of free chairs. She laid Henry down tenderly before sitting herself and beginning to fill in the details on the paperwork. She had barely gotten past writing their address when a nurse appeared and crouched down beside them.

“Hello, my name is Belle,” she said, a gentle Australian lilt to her voice. “Do you want to follow me? I think we’d better get this little man seen by a doctor.”

“Is it serious?” Emma asked, tossing her forms aside and scooping Henry easily into her arms once more.

“Well, let’s see what the doctor says before leaping to any conclusions,” Belle said over her shoulder as she led Emma out of the waiting area and down a wide, white corridor.
Emma swallowed thickly as she noted that she and her son had passed a large number of people who had surely been waiting in the hospital longer than they had. She hurried up to walk briskly beside Belle just as they turned into a small consultation room.

“Wait here,” Belle said, smiling reassuringly.

Feeling anything but reassured, Emma moved to the window, rocking Henry in her arms as she looked out at the dull, grey city before her, orange lights blinking through the continued downpour.

“It’s going to be ok, kid,” she whispered to the boy who was once again sleeping in her arms. She dropped a kiss to his forehead and winced as she felt how hot he was. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead despite the cold winter day. She blinked back tears as she watched his sleeping face contort in discomfort.

“Miss Swan?” came a voice from behind her.

Emma spun around. “Yes,” Emma said, taking in the young man with blindingly white hair standing before them, the white coat and stethoscope indicating his profession.

“I’m Doctor Whale,” he said. “Belle asked me to come and see you but I’m afraid I haven’t got any of your forms.”

“I didn’t fill them out,” Emma admitted. “This is Henry. He’s got a really bad fever and I can’t get him to eat anything.”

Doctor Whale nodded and beckoned Emma closer. She did so, laying Henry down on the examination table. He looked tiny, she noted, as he slept on, sprawled across the bed.

“A little background?” Doctor Whale asked as he set to work on his new patient.

“Henry is six,” Emma said. “He’s never been sick before, at least, no more than other children. And then after Christmas he started to go downhill. He said he had a sore throat and lost his appetite. By last night I couldn’t even get him to eat his favourite cereal. I knew you’d be busy for New Year’s Eve though, so I waited until today to bring him in. That wasn’t a mistake was it?” she asked anxiously, watching as Doctor Whale laid a stethoscope to Henry’s little chest.

“And when did the tiredness start?” he asked, ignoring Emma’s question.

“Um,” Emma frowned, trying to think. “The day before yesterday.”

Doctor Whale nodded and began to move his hands down Henry’s torso, pressing lightly. As his fingers pressed the soft flesh of his abdomen, Henry’s eyes flickered open and he began to cry, wriggling away from the painful touch. Doctor Whale stepped back and allowed Emma to gather the boy into her arms.

“I think it’s glandular fever,” he said, wrapping his stethoscope around his neck. “But I want to do a blood test just to rule anything else out. Do you know if he’s been in contact with someone who’s been infected. It could be anyone he’s met within the last two months.”

Emma shook her head blankly, eyes wide. “So what I can I do?” she asked, desperation in her tone.

“Nothing,” Doctor Whale said, moving to get a blood test kit. “Glandular fever is a virus so antibiotics don’t work. You can give him paracetamol to lower his fever and make sure he drinks lots of water and gets plenty of rest. And then you’ll just have to wait. Recovery time is usually about a month.”
“A month!” Emma exclaimed.

“Sometimes longer, sometimes shorter,” Doctor Whale said as he unwrapped the new needle and syringe. “Henry, I need you to be a big brave boy now and hold your arm out.”

Brown eyes peered over his mother’s shoulder, regarding the approaching doctor with suspicion.

“No,” came the muffled response as he buried his hot face in Emma’s neck.

His mother sighed. “Henry, buddy, you need to let the doctor do one little test and then he can make you better.”

“No he can’t,” Henry said. “I heard him say he can’t give me antibiotics.”

Emma’s eyebrows rose. She hadn’t realised her son was listening and was impressed with his comprehension levels. He had always been a bright child.

“Antibiotics,” she corrected. “And ok, he can’t give you anything to help but this test will make sure he definitely knows what is wrong with you.”

“It’ll be over in a few seconds,” Doctor Whale promised.

Henry’s eyes returned to the blonde stranger, eyes roving over him as if casting judgement.

“Ok,” he said at last, extracting his arm from between his body and Emma’s and holding it out for Doctor Whale.

“Good boy,” both adults said together.

Doctor Whale went to work at once as Emma tried to distract both herself and Henry from the needle now piercing his young skin. Henry bit his wobbling lip as he felt the stinging pain of the blood leaving his body and closed his eyes, tears leaking out as he did so. He felt the soft press of his mother’s lips on his cheek a seconds later and relaxed slightly when the needle was removed as quickly as it had come.

“Done,” Doctor Whale said, labelling and bagging the blood sample before returning to Henry’s arm and placing a Superman plaster over the tiny speck of red on his skin. “I’d like to keep Henry in for a few hours for observation and these test results won’t be back until tonight anyway. Belle can show you up to the ward. Oh, and when you get a chance can you please fill in those forms. Mr Gove just loves it when us doctors are drowning in paperwork rather than saving patients.”

Emma smiled, despite the situation. “Will do, thank you, Doctor Whale.”

“No problem at all. I’ll drop this sample down to the lab and be back to check on you in an hour or two. Here are some paracetamol he can have,” he said, handing over four tablets. “One every six hours. Nice to meet you, Henry. I’m sure you will start feeling better soon.”

Henry looked sceptical at that promise and nestled himself closer to Emma as the doctor left the room. Mere seconds passed before Belle reappeared, smiling widely.

“Hi again,” she said. “Hey Henry. How are you feeling?”

“My arm hurts too now,” Henry replied, gesturing to the spot where Doctor Whale had drawn blood now hidden beneath a triumphant Superman.

“Oh dear,” Belle said sympathetically. “Well then let’s go and find you a nice comfy bed where
you and your mum can wait for a while. How does that sound?”

Henry nodded his head in agreement and Belle turned her attention to Emma. “Doctor Whale asked me to take you up to one of the private paediatric rooms as we can’t have a child infected with glandular fever on the public ward.”

“Sure,” Emma nodded. “Lead the way.”

A few minutes later Emma and Henry were gawping at the room they had just stepped into. Coloured images were painted onto the walls and a large window looked out onto the city, the last of the day’s light fading behind the silhouetted buildings on the horizon.


“The NHS is doing what it can to compete with the private practices which are encroaching,” Belle said, pulling back the bright blue bedspread and watching Emma lower her son into the bed. “Can I get you guys anything? Food? Drink?”

“I’m ok, thanks,” Emma said. “Henry? Are you hungry?”

The boy shook his head, looking around in awe at the characters on the wall.

“Ok, I’ll be back in a bit to check up on you guys. In the meantime, TV remote is there, magazines are a little out of date but still readable, and there’s a coffee machine just down the hall if you need a little boost.”

Emma thanked the nurse who then left before sinking into the armchair beside the bed and turning to her son.

“It’s so cool in here!” Henry exclaimed. “Baloo is looking right at me.”

“He is,” Emma nodded. “And Bagherra is above your head.”

Henry turned and smiled up at the black panther crouched over his bed. He snuggled down beneath the duvet and looked around once more. Emma couldn’t help but smile at seeing how her son had perked up due to The Jungle Book themed room but she also knew he still felt very sick. She had had glandular fever herself as a child and remembered weeks of discomfort and pain. Her heart ached thinking of Henry going through that too. But at least they had a diagnosis, she reasoned. At least it was something which he’d get better from.

Two hours later, Belle returned to the room.

“How is he?” she whispered, not wanting to disturb Henry who was finally asleep.

“Hot,” Emma replied, turning off the television which she’d been watching with the volume turned way down. “But he’s been sleeping for about an hour now.”

“Doctor Whale is expecting the results within the next hour,” Belle said. “He’d have come himself but we’re very busy up on the ward. Do you want me to sit with Henry whilst you go and get something to eat and a coffee. You look like you need it.”

“Would you mind?” Emma asked just as her stomach growled. She hadn’t eaten all day.

“Go ahead,” Belle assured. “The cafeteria is on the ground floor. Steer clear of the pies; Mary
Berry would have a field day about their soggy bottoms. But the sandwiches are pretty good.”

Emma grinned at the fellow Great British Bake Off fan. “Thanks, I’ll be as quick as I can.”

She pressed a final kiss to Henry’s forehead and was pleased to note the paracetamol Doctor Whale had given him was working its magic. With a final glance at her sleeping son, she headed out of the room.

The corridors were busy, patients, families and staff weaving amongst one another. Emma reached the lifts and joined the small group travelling downwards. Several of them also followed Emma in the direction of the signposted cafeteria and they spilled collectively into the large space minutes later. Emma glanced around and headed straight for the sandwich display, deciding to take Belle’s advice seriously. With a BLT for herself and a chicken salad for Henry, in case he was hungry when he woke up, she moved towards the coffee counter.

“Flat white, please,” she told the barista. “Two shots.”

“Same for me, please,” came a voice from beside her. “As quick as you can.”

Emma turned, eyebrows raised, in the direction of the deep tone. Stood next to her was a beautiful brunette, her white coat jiggling as she tapped her foot in impatience.

“Sorry,” she said as she noted Emma looking curiously at her. “I didn’t mean to jump onto your order. I’ve got five minutes left of my break and I needed a little caffeine boost.”

“Understood,” Emma said simply, turning back to the barista and watching her work.

There was an awkward silence, filled only with the hum of the cafeteria and the hiss of the coffee machine.

“Who are you here with?”

Emma turned back to the doctor beside her, hesitating a moment before answering. “My son.”

“I’m sorry,” the doctor said.

“Thanks,” Emma said shortly.

Another pause.

“Who’s treating him?”

Once more, Emma looked towards the doctor. She took in the woman in more detail this time. She had short brown hair, perfectly styled to flick out at the ends. Her eyes were a brilliant brown but beneath them were the unmistakable dark circles of a hangover. Her complexion, too, was a little paler than Emma would have expected given her hair colour. A stethoscope was draped around her elegant neck, dangling against her collarbones just visible through the v-neck of her blue scrubs. The woman’s fingers were twisting together impatiently, fingerling the buttons of her doctor’s coat.

“Doctor Whale,” Emma replied.

“He’s good,” the doctor said. “Not as good as me, but good.”

Emma couldn’t help but laugh at the cocky statement. The doctor beamed at her, seemingly glad she had raised the worried mother’s spirits.
They fell silent once more watching as the milk was added to their respective coffees. As soon as they were ready, they moved simultaneously to the counter, each handing over their money. The doctor took a large gulp at once, sighing in contentment and ignoring the stinging burn of her tongue as the hot liquid met her mouth.

“Big night last night?” Emma asked, sipping more tentatively at her steaming drink.

“First New Year’s Eve off in seven years,” the doctor nodded. “Although I’m regretting it now.”

“Good luck for the rest of your shift then,” Emma said.

“Thanks,” the doctor said. “Good luck to you and your son.”

Emma nodded at that, remembering her little boy lying upstairs, in pain and sick. Her mouth set in a thin line and she hurried off, not even saying goodbye to the doctor who stood by the counter watching her go. It wasn’t until her blonde hair flicked around the corner that Regina Mills snapped out of her reverie and headed for her office, shaking herself a little to regain focus.

“It is glandular fever,” Whale announced not long after Emma returned. “I’d recommend Henry stays in overnight tonight as there are a couple more tests we want to run and it would be easier if he were here tomorrow morning instead of you coming back for the results.”

“What sort of tests?” Emma asked, her hand drifting protectively towards Henry’s little body, the boy still sleeping soundly.

“There are just a couple of anomalies in his blood work and I’d like to check out a couple of suspicions.”

“Suspicions?”

“Nothing to worry about,” Doctor Whale assured. “We’re just being thorough.”

Emma looked unconvinced. “Um, ok. We’ll stay if you think we should,”

“You should,” he said firmly. “But I’m afraid my shift is finishing in ten minutes. My colleague will be taking over from me though and she’ll be along in a little while to explain what tests we’re going to be running. Any questions for me before I go?”

“No, thank you, Doctor.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll probably see you tomorrow, anyway. I hope you both have a good night’s sleep.”

“Not likely,” Emma murmured, looking back towards her son.

Doctor Whale didn’t answer, deciding it was unnecessary to do so. Instead he clipped Henry’s lab results to the board at the bottom of the small boy’s bed and headed out into the corridor.

Emma was dosing the next time the door opened, her head resting awkwardly against Henry’s mattress. The boy himself, however, was awake, looking around the colourful room with interest. As the new doctor appeared, his eyes narrowed slightly.

“Hello Henry,” she said, moving towards the bed. “How are you feeling?”
“Poorly,” came the simple reply. “Who are you?”

“My name is Doctor Mills,” she introduced. “But you can call me Regina if you want.”

“Regina?”

Two pairs of brown eyes snapped to the sleepy blonde who had just woken up. She looked between her son and the new doctor, eyebrows shooting up her forehead in recognition.

“Oh, hi,” she said, sitting up rapidly and wiping the streak of drool from the side of her mouth.

“We meet again,” Regina said, smiling coyly. “Doctor Mills, at your service.”

She held out her hand across the bed and Emma took it, the skin soft and warm beneath her own.

“Emma Swan,” the blonde said. “You’re a paediatrician?”

“Indeed I am,” she nodded solemnly. “And I’m going to do my very best to work out what is wrong with your son.”

“Doctor Whale’s already told us,” Emma said, frowning at the statement. “He’s got glandular fever, right?”

Regina bit her lip. She hated this part of her job. She had chosen to specialise in children because she loved to help them and their families in any way she could. But sometimes there were no answers and telling a parent she had no clue what was making their child sick was the worst feeling in the world.

“He does,” Regina nodded. “But we think it might be a bit more complicated than that.”
A/N: so I’m convinced reviews are addictive. I was actually planning on posting one chapter per week for this fic because I’m so busy at the moment but the flooding of my inbox meant I sat down early to write for you! Also, I realised I never specified in the last chapter but this story is once again set in England; London, to be precise! Which means all spellings will be British and there will be various cultural references our friends across the pond may not get, sorry! I chose to do this, however, because of the simple fact that everyone in the UK is entitled to free medical services thanks to our brilliant NHS. I didn’t want to complicate the storyline with insurance dramas and instead want to focus everything on Henry and our two favourite ladies. Anyway, onwards …

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Emma stood up, ashen faced.

“What’s wrong with him?” she asked, throat tight.

Regina glanced at Henry who was looking curiously between both adults. “Um, would you mind stepping outside with me, Miss Swan? Henry, why don’t you see what you can find to watch on the TV?” she suggested, handing over the controls.

The six year old looked up at her, aware he was being distracted from something important but the temptation of cartoons was too irresistible to stop him reaching out and taking the remote from the smiling brunette.

“I’ll be right outside,” Emma said, kissing Henry’s brow before following the doctor from the room.

As soon as the door closed softly behind the two women, Emma let out a shuddering breath. Regina looked sympathetically on as the blonde sank into a chair in the hallway and after a moment, she did the same.

“What’s going on?” Emma asked, suddenly sounding exhausted.

“Well, we’re not entirely sure,” Regina admitted. “But there were a few interesting results in Henry’s blood work and we’d like to run a couple more tests to eliminate any other causes, aside from the glandular fever.”

“What other causes?” Emma said.

“We don’t know yet,” Regina admitted. “But we want to find out. The best way for us to pinpoint a problem is to take a detailed family history. That way we can identify any genetic diseases which could be affecting him and rule those out first.”

“Genetic diseases?” Emma frowned. “What does that mean?”

“Henry’s blood contains elevated levels of lymphocytes and histiocytes,” Regina began. “Two
types of white blood cells. But he’s also got low red blood cells. There are many different explanations for these results and it could all be linked to the glandular fever but since Henry is rather young and the fever Doctor Whale recorded was very high, we want to make sure he isn’t battling anything else as well.”

“Anything else?” Emma repeated. “So he might be sick with two things?”

She looked towards the door, behind which her son was lying, dwarfed in the middle of a large hospital bed, hot and tired and in pain. Her heart ached and she silently prayed it was her who was ill rather than Henry.

“We don’t know,” Regina said, wishing she could give Emma more definitive answers. “But we want to find out. Firstly, would you mind taking me through your family’s medical history? The more detail the better.”

Emma sighed and flopped back in her chair, hands covering her face. Regina hesitated before reaching out and laying a comforting hand on Emma’s arm.

“I know this is hard, Miss Swan,” she said gently. “But we need to do this, for Henry.”

“No, it’s not that,” Emma said, dropping her hands from her face and looking at the doctor sat beside her. “I can’t really give you a family history beyond myself.” At Regina’s frown, Emma continued. “I was abandoned as a baby and put into the foster system. I never knew anything about my parents when I was growing up and couldn’t find them when I went searching after I turned 18. What if they’ve got some horrible disease and that’s why they gave me up?”

“Are you sick?” Regina asked simply.

“No, but -.”

“Then it’s unlikely that’s the reason,” Regina said. “And if you’ve not shown any symptoms of any genetic disease then perhaps this is something Henry got from his father.”

Emma bit her lip. “Can’t help you there either,” she admitted. “It wasn’t exactly a long relationship.” She blushed, embarrassed at having admitted to the doctor she had fallen pregnant after a one-night-stand.

“Oh,” Regina said. “Right, well, never mind about the family history for now. As far as everything goes with you, however, is there anything I should know in your medical history?”

“I had glandular fever when I was young too,” Emma shrugged. “Got over it quickly enough and haven’t really been ill since.”

“Ok, good,” Regina nodded, making a note on Henry’s papers. “Well, what I’ll do is run a few more general tests, see if we can pick up any more details from those results and then go from there. I believe Doctor Whale confirmed with you that you’d be in overnight?”

Emma nodded. She hated the thought of staying in the hospital, however. It made everything suddenly seem very real. But on the other hand, the thought of going back to her flat without knowing what was wrong with Henry was equally unappealing.

“I’ve got the nightshift today so I’ll be around if you need me,” Regina said. “Do you have any questions?”

“Do you have any answers?” Emma bit back.
Regina blushed and looked away. She knew Emma didn’t mean to snap at her. She knew the blonde was just worried about her son and frustrated that the doctors didn’t seem to know what to do to help. She was sure she would feel the same way if she had children.

“Sorry,” Emma said after a moment. “I know you’re trying.”

“No need to apologise,” Regina assured. “I’ll come by in a few hours and see how Henry’s doing. If he hasn’t eaten anything, we may consider putting him on a drip for the night just to get his levels up. It will help with fighting the fever too.”

“Ok,” Emma said, standing up just as the doctor did. “Thank you, Doctor Mills.”

Regina nodded her understanding and watched as Emma peered around the door to her son’s room. With a final glance back over her shoulder and a slight smile at the doctor she disappeared. Taking a deep breath, Regina exhaled, sinking back into the chair she had just vacated. This was going to be a tough one, she could tell. She scanned the sparse notes in front of her, chewing her lip. Not much to go on, she mused, and it appeared they were unlikely to get any more familial information to add to the profile. She wondered briefly about Henry’s father. A man Emma had presumably met when she was rather young. After all, the blonde couldn’t be much older than … she checked the paper … twenty-five. What an ordeal to go through, Regina thought. A young, single mum with no family of her own.

Her mouth fell open as she realised the huge and varying assumptions she had just made about her patient’s mother. Jumping to her feet, Regina hurried away down the corridor, forcing her mind onto her next task.

“How are you doing, kid?” Emma asked as she settled back down besides Henry whose eyes were barely open as he fought to stay awake and watch Cartoon Network.

“I’m ok,” he said sleepily.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, holding out the chicken salad sandwich she had purchased earlier.

But the little boy shook his head, snuggling down under the covers and finally letting sleep claim him now his mother was back in the room. Emma ruffled his light brown hair and stood up. She walked over to the window, intending to draw the blinds against the black sky beyond. She paused for a moment, staring out over the glittering city below. The sounds of the street were muffled behind the glass, the cold night air pressing against the window but unable to penetrate. She should have felt safe, protected from the rain still hurtling down across London. But she didn’t. She felt far from safe. The blind lowered, eclipsing the world beyond and she turned back to her sleeping son.

As a mother, Emma had always strived to keep Henry safe. It hadn’t been easy. She hadn’t exactly planned to have a baby. But from the moment she had found out about the little life growing inside her, she couldn’t wait to meet him. The first few months had been the hardest but with a great support network she had made it through and created a life for her and her son. Their flat wasn’t large but it was big enough for the two of them and Henry had a room of his own. True, the railway line from Clapham Junction clattered right past their living room window but at least she didn’t have to walk far to catch the train to work. And Henry’s school was right around the corner too, allowing the little family to spend as much time together in the mornings as possible.

But now what? After six years of doing anything and everything she could to make sure her son was safe and happy and healthy … Emma was helpless. There was nothing she could do. Even if it
simply turned out to be glandular fever she knew Henry was in for weeks of discomfort as he recovered. But it wasn’t just glandular fever. That she knew too. If the doctors were telling her they feared something else, she knew things must be bad. They wouldn’t worry a parent for nothing.

She glanced at the door, silently begging Doctor Mills to walk through it and tell her it had all been a mistake and Henry could be taken home. The knob didn’t move. The door remained firmly shut. Sighing, Emma returned to her chair and switched off the TV. Pulling out her phone, she quickly replied to the many texts she had, reassuring everyone that Henry was OK. No point worrying them all yet, she reasoned. Noting the time, Emma suddenly stifled a yawn. She hadn’t realised how late it was and she had been up the previous night seeing in the New Year too. Doctor Mills had said she’d be a few hours, she thought to herself. If Henry was getting some sleep, she supposed she should too.

Regina didn’t notice her best friend enter the staff room until she had collapsed into the chair next to her. The brunette lowered the lab results she had been scrupulously analysing and raised one perfectly sculpted eyebrow.

“What the hell happened to you last night?” she asked, taking in the redhead’s dishevelled appearance.

“Don’t ask,” Zelena said, leaning forward and resting her forehead on the table, stethoscope clattering against the surface as she did so. “Is it eight yet?”

“It’s,” Regina checked her watch, “just gone midnight.”

“Oh God!” Zelena groaned, wrapping her arms around her head. “Please let me curl up and die.”

“Why your most recent assessment came back advising you to work on your bedside manner, I’ll never know,” Regina teased. “Seriously, Zee. We’re in a hospital and that’s the phrase you choose to use?”

“It’s an accurate description of how I feel right now,” Zelena argued.

Regina shrugged and went back to her notes. “I told you those jaeger-bombs were a mistake.”

“Yeah but you should see what I can get Robin to do in bed when he drinks that stuff,” Zelena said, her eyes glazing over in memory.

“Oh please, do not tell me anything about what happened between you and Robin last night,” Regina said. She had heard enough about their sexual escapades during the early months of their relationship. After two years of marriage, it appeared the heat hadn’t died down.

“Spoil sport,” Zelena said. “Anyway, what happened with you? Did you take that cute blonde home?”

“She had to work early this morning,” Regina shrugged. “She gave me her number but I haven’t called yet.”

“Are you gonna?” Zelena asked, leaning over and pulling the notes from Regina’s hands.

“Maybe,” she huffed. “Give them back please, Zee.”

“Who’s this?” Zelena asked, eyes scanning the pages. “His results are all over the place.”
“I know,” Regina said, snatching the records back. “New patient admitted this afternoon. Six years old, glandular fever and something else is lurking there too but I can’t work out what.”

The two doctors sat side by side in silence for a while, both taking in the numbers before them. Regina had already been in the staff room for half an hour, taking a longer break than she would usually do in order to delay the moment when she’d have to go and speak to Miss Swan and tell her they still had no idea what was wrong with her son. And yet, clearly, something was definitely not right with young Henry.

“Well the elevated lymphocytes could just be due to the glandular fever,” Zelena reasoned. “As could the low red blood cell count.”

“But what about the histiocytosis levels?” Regina asked.

Zelena frowned. Those results were also the ones that were troubling her and she knew they weren’t explained away by the glandular fever. She turned the page and scanned the information.

“Nothing more detailed?” she asked, pointing to the family history box. Regina shook her head and Zelena shrugged. “Good luck. Let me know if I can help or if you need a second opinion.”

“Thanks,” Regina said. “I’d better go and speak to his mother.”

“And say what?”

Regina didn’t answer. She couldn’t. She had no idea what she was going to tell Miss Swan, the mother to a very sick little boy for whom she didn’t have any diagnosis nor cure.

Emma awoke as soon as she heard Regina enter the room. Glancing first at her son, she was relieved to see the boy still sleeping. He was exhausted, she reasoned, and sleep would help his body conserve energy and recover faster. She stood and moved to join the doctor by the foot of the bed.

“How has he been?” Regina asked.

“Asleep mostly,” Emma said.

“Has he eaten?” Emma shook her head. “We will need to put him on an IV when he next wakes up then,” Regina said apologetically. “It’s the best thing for him if we want to boost his antibodies and start fighting the glandular fever.”

Emma nodded her understanding and looked back towards her sleeping son. “Any results yet?”

“Nothing conclusive, no,” Regina said. “If possible, I’d like to talk to Henry when he wakes up, get a little more detail about how he’s feeling. If he has any particular aches or pains then we can also investigate what might be causing them.”

“Aches?” Emma frowned.

“We want to consider all possibilities,” Regina said simply.

“You’re thinking meningitis, aren’t you?” Emma said.

Dark eyebrows rose once more. It was clear someone had been googling symptoms, never a helpful activity for a worried parent to partake in. “We’re not speculating here,” Regina said. “But we can’t afford to rule anything out.”
“Can you test it now?” Emma asked, moving at once to Henry’s side. “Please, just … I need to know.”

“We … we can,” Regina nodded. “But you’ll need to wake him if you want me to do a lumbar puncture. That’s the most effective diagnosis we have. Give me two minutes to get a kit.”

Emma nodded shortly and turned to her son, shaking his small shoulders gently. “Henry, honey, it’s time to wake up.”

The boy squirmed away from her touch, reluctant to rejoin the real world. He rolled onto his side and buried his face in the pillow. Emma sighed and gently turned him back over, kissing his cheek. Eventually, brown eyes fluttered open just as Regina retuned to the room with the test kit.

“What?” he asked, his voice hoarse and weak.

“Doctor Mills is here and she needs to talk to you and do a couple of tests,” Emma explained, blinking back tears as she saw her son’s pale, sweaty face.

“Hi Henry,” Regina said. “Remember me?”

“Yeah, Gina,” Henry yawned.

“That’s right,” Regina smiled. “I’m here to ask you a few questions and to try and make you feel better. Is that ok?”

Henry nodded slowly, eyeing the doctor with suspicion. “What’s that?” he asked, looking at the lumbar puncture equipment Regina had placed on the end of his bed.

“This is something which is going to help us find out if you’re sick,” Regina said. “Henry, can you tell me how you feel?”

“Sleepy,” Henry said, looking pointedly at his mother.

Despite the situation, the two women couldn’t help but chuckle.

“And aside from that, can you describe anything else you’re feeling? Any aches or pains?”

“I’m hot,” Henry said. “And my body feels tired all the time. My head is heavy too and my neck hurts when I move.”

“Any rashes?” Regina asked, now looking at Emma even as she unwrapped the meningitis test kit.

“Not that I’ve seen,” Emma said. “Is it …?”

“Let’s do the test and then we can know for sure,” Regina said, giving nothing away in her tone. “Henry, I need you to be a big boy and roll onto your side with your back to me. I need to give you a little injection in the bottom of your back so I can test your body, ok?”

Henry’s eyes widened as he spotted the needle protruding from the syringe. “No,” he said firmly. “That isn’t little.”

Emma crouched down so she was eye level with her son. “No,” she conceded. “It isn’t. But Doctor Mills wants to make you better and she needs to test something in your back to do that. And once she knows what is wrong with you, you’ll get better. And we want that, right?”

“Yeah,” Henry said slowly, still looking between his mother and the needle. “But that will hurt.”
“I’m going to give you another tiny injection so you can’t feel it at all,” Regina assured him.

Henry considered each woman for a while. The stranger, a gentle smile on her face was looking down at him with reassurance and kindness. His mother … he didn’t think he’d ever seen his mother look like that before. Her skin was paler than usual and her eyes looked glassy and red around the edges. He thought she might have been crying.

“Ok,” he said quietly. “But only if it doesn’t hurt.”

“I promise,” Regina said. “Now if you roll onto your side and look at your mum then I can do this test quickly and you can get back to sleep.”

Henry followed the instructions and soon Regina had him curled in the foetal position, his wide brown eyes locked with his mother’s worried green ones. Regina glanced at Emma and received the nod of consent. Moving Henry’s hospital gown aside, she worked quickly to clean the area at the base of the boy’s bony spine and administered the local anaesthetic. She glanced over his skin for rashes as she waited for the drug to take effect. She was relieved to see no external signs of meningitis and soon was lining up the needle to perform the test.

Even though he couldn’t feel it, as the needle pierced his skin, Henry began to cry. Regina’s hand on his waist steadied his body and didn’t allow him to pull away. Emma was whispering nonsense to him, trying to calm him down and distracting him from the dim sensations in his back. The boy trembled beneath Regina’s touch as she extracted the cerebrospinal fluid. She worked as quickly as she could but it still took half an hour until she finally moved away.

“Done,” she whispered, moving Henry’s hospital gown back into place and bagging the test.

“How long until we know?” Emma asked, helping Henry roll onto his still numb back and wiping his tear-streaked face.

“The results take two days,” Regina said. “But I’ll push them to have them back tomorrow. In the meantime, it is possible to start Henry on the antibiotics even without confirmation if we suspect meningitis is the second illness here.”

“And do we suspect that?” Emma asked.

Regina shrugged. “Some symptoms fit, others don’t. It’s very hard to get an accurate diagnosis when the body is fighting two different viruses or diseases. It sends the results a little loopy, to be honest, and the best we can do is eliminate one after another through tests.”

“What would you do? If you were Henry’s mother?” Emma asked.

“I’d have him put on a drip for the next twelve hours,” Regina said. “And I’d start the meningitis antibiotics now too. But then I’d want to take him home. There’s nothing more we can do for him here until the results come back. I suspect you’d both rather be at home than in the hospital, correct?”

“Yes,” Emma said. “Yes, that sounds like the best solution. Henry,” she said, turning to her son. “Doctor Mills needs to give you a special thing to make you feel better called a drip now.”

“Drip?” Henry asked. “Like what a tap does?”

“Exactly,” Regina said who had stuck her head out of the door in the meantime and requested an IV set from a passing nurse. “We are going to attach a bag of healthy liquids to a tube and it’s going to drip into your body.”
“How?” Henry asked suspiciously.

“Though a tiny needle in your hand,” Regina explained just as a nurse entered with the equipment she needed.

“Another needle?” Henry frowned, turning to Emma. “Mum, I want to go home. I don’t want to stay here any more.”

Emma dropped to her knees again and pushed Henry’s sweaty hair away from his hot brow. “I know, baby, but we have to make you better. Doctor Mills is going to make you feel much better with her special liquid.”

“Through a needle,” Henry pouted. “Can’t I just drink it?”

“It doesn’t work that way, Henry” Regina said softly.

Henry watched as the nurse hung up a clear bag beside his bed, filled with this strange medicine his mother and doctor wanted him to take. He looked back at his mother and caught the sadness etched on her features just before she forced a smile for his benefit.

“Oh,” Henry said quietly, holding out his hand.

Regina worked as quickly as she could and within minutes Henry’s weak body was hooked up to the bag. He stared at the needle, hidden beneath the tape which entered his body. He couldn’t really feel it, he realised as he glanced up at the bag and watched the liquid sliding slowly down the tube until it disappeared inside him.

“So I’ll get better now?” he asked, stifling a yawn.

“We hope so,” Regina said. “I’ve got to head off on my rounds now but I’ll come back in the morning to see how the night has been. I’d recommend you both get some rest as it’s almost two in the morning. Well done, Henry. You were very brave for me and your mum, so thank you.”

Henry smiled proudly and waved to Regina with his free hand as the doctor entered the room.

“I like her,” he announced to his mother. “Even though she stuck me with three needles.”

“She’s helping you get better, remember? It’s her job,” Emma said as she took her seat once more and pulled a spare blanket over her body.

“Yeah, because she’s a doctor,” Henry said, snuggling back under his own covers and closing his eyes. “Do you like her, Mum?”

“Um, yeah, I suppose,” Emma said, thrown by the question. Doctors were doctors, after all. She had never considered whether she ‘liked’ one or not before. With Henry’s last question running through her head, Emma followed her son into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: just to say also, I was absolutely blown away by the response to the first chapter, so thank you for your interest and support!
A/N: hi guys. I’m back from my holiday in England and am drowning in work after a month’s absence. My plan is to update this fic at least weekly. Perhaps more often … but I pledge now that there will be at least one update per week. Hope that’s ok! Guesses as to what Henry has welcome - first person who gets it correct can submit a prompt for a one(or more) shot!

The following afternoon Henry and Emma finally left the hospital. Yesterday’s rain had left the city grey and dull, a lifeless start to a new year. They walked slowly across the car park, Henry holding tightly to Emma’s hand and shuffling along, a blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Once buckled safely into his seat, they set off the short distance to their flat in Clapham.

Emma had barely tucked Henry into his bed when there was a hammering on the front door. Seconds later, Emma’s best friend was bursting into the flat, leaving the blonde standing stock still by open door.

“What happened?” Ruby asked, dyed red hair flying behind her as she rushed towards Henry’s bedroom.

“Hi Rubes,” Emma said, closing the door and following the ball of energy.

“Not feeling well, my little man?” Ruby asked, sitting on the side of Henry’s bed and peering at his pale face.

He shook his head, sniffing slightly.

“Glandular fever,” Emma said.

“And they kept him in overnight?” Ruby frowned. “Why?”

Emma glanced at Henry and then nodded her head back towards the living room. Assuring Henry they’d be just outside if he needed anything, the two friends made their way back into the main area of the flat and Emma quickly nipped into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. Once she was settled on the sofa besides Ruby, a hot mug in each of their hands, she began.

“Well, you know I took him to hospital because of his fever,” Emma said and Ruby nodded. She had been in the flat when her friend had decided to head to A and E with her son, the temperature too alarming to ignore any longer. “They diagnosed it as glandular fever pretty quickly and did a blood test just to be sure but when the results from that came back the doctor thought something else might be wrong.”

“Something else?” Ruby frowned. “What?”

Emma shrugged. “They don’t know. They are running tests and they did a spinal tap to check for meningitis but they’re not actually sure. Henry’s on antibiotics for meningitis already but we won’t know the test results until tomorrow morning at the earliest. Doctor Mills is pushing for quick results but the labs can only work as fast as they can.”
“Poor Henry,” Ruby murmured, sipping her tea. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“I’m ok for now,” Emma said. “Killian has said I can take the week off to look after Henry so at least I can be here with him for now. After that, he’s happy for me to work from home as well if necessary.”

Emma had been relieved but not surprised when her boss had assured her not to hurry back to work before she was able to. She and Killian had met in high school and been firm friends ever since. When the young man opened up an independent publishing house Emma had been his first hire. Although she didn’t write herself, the blonde had always had an eye for good literature and had quickly risen to senior editor. The company was only small so Emma’s wage wasn’t anything impressive but it kept the cupboards stocked and she was squirrelling away enough each month to work towards buying a house in the not too distant future.

“Well, any time you need me to babysit the little man let me know,” Ruby said.

“Thanks,” Emma said. “I may take you up on that as I have a meeting next week with a new writer I’d really like to attend.”

“Name the time and date and I’ll make sure Billy does the rota so my shifts ensure I’m free,” Ruby said, giving Emma a mock salute. The redhead worked as a mechanic in a specialist car garage, tinkering with high-end sports cars and bikes alongside her boyfriend of three years, Billy.

Emma chuckled lightly and then sighed, flopping back onto the sofa cushions. Ruby placed her empty mug on the table and did the same.

“You ok?” Ruby asked quietly.

“No,” came the whispered response. “I’m terrified.”

Ruby reached across and squeezed Emma’s hand. “They’ll find out what’s wrong with him soon and he’ll be on the mend,” she said.

Emma nodded but her expression looked doubtful. She couldn’t stop thinking about the fact that the doctors had no family history to go on. Without knowledge of Henry’s genetic make-up, she knew the experts were going to have much harder time diagnosing what was causing her son’s sickness. She wished she could help them. She wished, not for the first time in her life, she knew who her parents were.

“Have you called Mary and David?” Ruby asked.

“Not yet,” Emma said. “I literally just got home.”

“I know,” Ruby said. “I was waiting for you.”

“Stalker,” Emma said with a slight smile. Her best friend had moved into the flat opposite when the previous tenant moved out a few years ago. Billy lived there too and Emma had to admit it was great having them both so close by. Even if it did mean Ruby turned up unannounced at all hours of the day and night. Emma suspected that had she not had Henry, she’d have been enjoying the same wild times in her mid-twenties.

Suddenly feeling guilty for thinking of her life without Henry, Emma jumped to her feet and made her way through to her son’s bedroom. He had fallen asleep, arms stuck out of the duvet to try and cool himself down. Emma sat down beside him and switched off the bedside lamp, the room now only dimly lit from the small window. She watched him sleep for a while before placing a kiss to
his forehead and returning to her friend. Ruby was waiting on the sofa, sensing Emma needed to be alone.

“So, what did I miss?” Emma asked, needing to get off the subject of her son’s poor health.

“Not much,” Ruby said. “Billy was working yesterday, so I was bored but too hungover to really do much even if I had had company. I worked this morning but came home at lunch because the garage was dead.”

“Business slow?”

“Nah,” Ruby replied. “It was more that no one wants to deal with fixing their cars up on a bank holiday. We’ll have people back in tomorrow.”

They chatted for another hour or so until they were interrupted by a sniffling Henry emerging from his room, asking for some food. Given that he hadn’t eaten anything for almost two days, Emma was ecstatic at the apparent progress and at once whisked her son into the kitchen so they could together decide what their dinner was going to consist of. Ruby let herself out after saying goodbye, reminding Emma that should the blonde need anything, both she and Billy were just across the hall.

Regina stared out of the window of her penthouse, chewing her thumb. She was due in work in little over an hour and she hadn’t truly been able to switch off since she had left the hospital eleven hours previous. She had always prided herself on being able to separate herself from her patients. As a paediatrician it was essential for her not to allow her emotions to cloud her professional judgement. Usually she succeeded. But those wide brown eyes of a certain little boy had eventually forced her to take a sleeping tablet to ensure she got enough rest before her following night shift that evening.

The rota was killing her already. Four days of straight night shifts and she had three more left. She had never been good at sleeping during the day but when she didn’t sleep, well, that was when mistakes started to happen. She forced herself to move away from dwelling on that subject. But her mind just slipped back onto Henry Swan, conjuring images of his little body wrapped in the hospital blanket.

What could be wrong with him? she thought to herself, wracking her brains to try and list all the possible diagnoses she would have to check for. There were so many, she decided. The symptoms too varied, the family history too sparse. She had no way of narrowing down the search parameters in the vast universe of medical possibilities. She glanced at the clock again. Still forty-five minutes to go.

She returned to staring out of the window, darkness already shrouding the city across which thousands and thousands of lights now glittered. A train rattled past, the sound barely identifiable at the height she now stood. But she could see it pulling in, the vast expanse of tracks which marked Clapham Junction station shimming still from the earlier rain.

To hell with it, she thought, grabbing her handbag, phone and keys. The penthouse door slammed behind her seconds later.

“What are you doing here?” asked Doctor Whale.

“I wanted to chat with you before I took over,” Regina explained to her fellow doctor who was
perusing an x-ray of what was clearly a three broken ribs.

“About what?”

“Henry Swan,” Regina said. “The six year old with glandular fever and those strange blood results yesterday. Did we get the lumbar puncture test back yet?”

“No,” Doctor Whale said slowly. “And if we had, I would have notified the mother.”

“Of course,” Regina said. “I wasn’t suggesting otherwise. I was just … curious. I mean, do you have any thoughts about what we could be dealing with?”

Doctor Whale shrugged and slid the x-ray back into its folder. “Meningitis is a good guess,” he said, turning to Regina. “Not much we can do before those results come back anyway. That or the kid so we can run more tests. They checked out this afternoon, you know.”

“Yeah,” Regina nodded. “Well, I guessed they would. Nothing more we can do for them is there.”

Doctor Whale frowned at the forlorn tone in Regina’s voice. “Hey, we did what we could for him,” he said. “We’re doing what we can for him. And we’re A and E doctors, remember? If this is something more, it’s not our place to investigate anyway.”


“You’re welcome. Now, do you want to go over my notes for patients who are actually here?”

Regina couldn’t help but laugh and nodded her agreement to the suggestion. Together, the two doctors set about going over the information for the eleven different unlucky people who had ended up in A and E so far that day whose care was about to be in Regina’s hands.

Emma slept badly that night, getting up at least every hour to check Henry. Most of those visits found the boy asleep but at four in the morning she had come across him sat up in bed, crying quietly. She had held him to her chest, cradling him softly and reassuring him that everything would be alright. He was in pain and uncomfortable and Emma’s heart was breaking. There was nothing she could do however, except give him a paracetamol and wait until he had at last fallen asleep once more.

By the time Emma finally gave up on trying to get a good night’s sleep it was seven in the morning. Yawning as she flicked on the kettle, she reluctantly pulled out her phone and checked her work emails. There were a few she knew she ought to answer, even though the day was technically a bank holiday and Killian had given her the week off. She set about sending a quick reply to a writer newly signed to the publishing house as she waited for her tea to become ready.

Just as she had pressed send, Henry appeared in the doorway. He had dragged his duvet behind him and was shrouded in a elaborate cape, Batman’s printed image downwards so it looked like he was diving headlong into the kitchen floor.

“Hi buddy,” Emma said, crouching down to his level so they could hug. “How was your sleep?”

“I’m thirsty,” Henry said, ignoring the question.

Emma got a glass of milk for her son and steered him into the living room where he climbed up onto the sofa and she tucked the duvet back around him. He requested toast with Nutella for breakfast. Normally Emma wouldn’t allow him to have eaten a chocolate based breakfast when it
wasn’t a special occasion but he had eaten so little of the pasta she had cooked last night that she was happy to give him anything which would actually pass his lips. She thought he looked thinner, although quickly shook that thought from her head and headed towards the kitchen to make her son his breakfast.

Henry managed to eat almost an entire slice before pushing the plate away, chocolate spread smeared around his mouth and he smiled slightly as Emma took the remaining food back into the kitchen. Staring out of the window, Emma watched the sky lighten over London and glanced at the clock. Almost eight in the morning. She couldn’t wait until the dark winter faded away into a distant memory and they could enjoy being outside before and after school again. Just as she was about to return to the living room her mobile began to ring. Emma frowned at the early call from an unknown number but answered it anyway.

“Hello?”

“Hello, is that Miss Swan?” came the voice on the other end.

“Speaking,” Emma nodded.

“Miss Swan, it’s Regina Mills from King’s College Hospital here, how are you?”

“Oh, Doctor Mills,” Emma said, heart suddenly beating faster. “I’m fine thanks, you?”

“I’m very well, thank you,” Regina replied. “And how is young Henry?”

“He’s doing ok,” Emma said, moving to the kitchen door so she could peer through it to check her son was still on the sofa watching television. He was. “He ate a little pasta last night and some toast this morning.”

“Vegetables and fruit would be better,” Regina said. “But at least he’s eating.”

“There was broccoli with the pasta,” Emma defended. “And it was whole grain toast.”

“I’m sorry,” Regina said. “I didn’t mean to imply anything but it is important Henry receives as many vitamins as he can.”

“I know,” Emma said. There was a slight pause. “Um, are you calling with some results?”

“Oh, yes,” Regina said, sounding slightly like she had been jolted out of a reverie. “We got the test from the lumbar puncture back just now and Henry has tested negative for meningitis.”

Emma let out a long, low exhale of relief and was immediately filled with a second wave of dread.

“So what is wrong with him?” Emma asked. “If it’s not meningitis and it’s not only glandular fever, what is it?”

“We still don’t know,” Regina admitted. “But we have decided it would be in Henry’s best interests to return to Kings College as soon as possible, check into the paediatric ward and then my colleagues up there can get to work finding out what’s wrong.”

“Your colleagues?” Emma said. “So, we’d get a new doctor?”

She didn’t know why but suddenly the idea of Henry having a doctor, any doctor, who wasn’t Regina Mills was suddenly very unappealing to the blonde.

“I’m afraid I’m based in A and E,” Regina said. “But I’d be happy to come up to the ward once
Henry’s settled in and see how his doctor is getting on.”

“No, it’s ok,” Emma said, knowing she sounded petty kicking up a fuss about something so trivial when all that mattered was the fact that there was going to be someone working out what was wrong with her son. “I’m sure the new doctor will be just as good as you.”

“She’s fantastic,” Regina assured. “In fact, she’s a friend of mine and I’ve specifically requested her for Henry’s case. Her name is Zelena West and she’s a fellow paediatrician. I think you’ll find her quite charming and highly competent.”

Emma smiled at that. She didn’t think anyone has ever described another human as ‘charming’ to her before. She found herself wondering what Regina’s background was. She came from money, of that Emma was sure due to the way the brunette carried herself and spoke. Well educated, of course, and highly intelligent. The fact that she was a fully qualified paediatrician at such a young age made that evident.

“Miss Swan?”

Her name brought the blonde back down to earth with a bump. “What?”

“Is that ok?” Regina repeated. “For me to refer you to Doctor West?”

“Um, yeah,” Emma said. “If that’s what you thin is best for Henry.”

“I do,” Regina said. “Doctor West comes on shift this afternoon so I suggest you come to the hospital any time after two. “Tell her you met me in A and E and she’ll see you right away.”

“Thank you, Doctor Mills,” Emma said. “Thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome, Miss Swan. “Please send my best wishes to Henry. Oh, and you can stop giving him those meningitis tablets too.”

“I figured as much,” Emma chuckled.

“Of course, I just thought I’d check. Good luck this afternoon.”

“Thank you,” Emma said.

With that, the call ended and Emma leaned against the door frame, watching her son who was sipping some milk tentatively. Back to hospital. More tests. More uncertainty. She knew meningitis was serious but at least it was treatable. Now however, they were back to square one with no possible leads as to what Henry might be suffering from. She didn’t know how to tell him, what to tell him, how much he was already aware of. Making a mental note to ask this new Doctor West about how to broach the subject with Henry, Emma set about packing an overnight bag for her son. She got the feeling they were not going to find themselves back in the apartment that evening.
A New Doctor

Chapter Notes

A/N: hey guys. I did say this was going to be less frequent - work has been crazy. And I’ll warn you now, next week is even more manic but I will do my upmost to get you a chapter by next Friday.

Henry had grumbled slightly when Emma had gently broken the news that they had to return to the hospital but had been placated by the knowledge that he no longer had to take the large pills his mother had been serving up. What he didn’t understand was that the misdiagnosis of meningitis opened up an infinite realm of other possibilities. He had climbed sleepily into the back of Emma’s car, the blonde silently saying prayers of thanks to herself for deciding to keep and maintain the old vehicle. Since moving to London when she was eighteen, she had been debating getting rid of the old Volkswagen Beetle. After all, no one drove in the capital. But she hadn’t been able to part with the sunshine yellow bug and it was now proving its worth.

It didn’t take long to drive to the hospital in the early afternoon traffic and Emma was soon parking outside. Henry looked up at the vast building as they walked back towards it, seemingly sceptical as to whether the trained professionals inside really would help. After all, last time all they had done was prod needles in his body and given him yucky medicine which made him even more sleepy.

Rather than walking into A and E, the two of them headed to the main admittance area where they could check into the ward. This part of the hospital was quieter and rather less hectic than the emergency department had been. In fact, there was only one other person in the space, a black man staring intently at a computer screen behind the reception, tapping away on the keyboard.

“Hi,” Emma said as she approached the main desk. “We were in A and E yesterday but then I got a phone call saying to come here and check my son in. We were told to ask for Doctor Zelena West.”

“You don’t request doctors,” the young man on reception frowned. “This is the NHS, you know. You get whoever is available.”

Emma blushed. She hadn’t intended to sound entitled in any way. “Sorry,” she said hastily. “It was just that Doctor Mills told us to ask for her.”

Brown eyes opened. “Regina?” he asked. “She referred you to Doctor West?”

“Yes,” Emma said, nodding slowly as she noted how the man’s eyes lit up at the mention of Doctor Mills.

“Well then of course I’ll go and find her right away for you. Please take a seat with your son and I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Stunned by the sudden turn around, Emma led Henry over to some comfortable chairs and allowed him to clamber onto her lap. He stuck his thumb in his mouth and began to suck as he looked around the new environment.
“Henry,” Emma scolded, gently pulling his thumb from between his lips.

“But I’m sick,” he argued, pouting at his mother’s continued attempts to stop his childhood habit.

“Do you want braces?” Emma asked.

The pout continued, the mild threat of years of orthodontist visits doing little to abate his desire to return to his old comfort method, especially now he found himself back in hospital again. But he rested his head on Emma’s shoulder instead just as a woman with bright orange hair entered the waiting area followed by the man from reception hurrying along behind her.

“Miss Swan?” asked the woman as she approached the little family.

“Yes,” Emma said, unable to get up with Henry in her lap so she stretched out her hand. “Doctor West?”

“Indeed,” Doctor West said, shaking Emma’s offered hand. “And this must be Henry,” she added, crouching down and smiling up into his face, half hidden in Emma’s hair.

“Hi,” Henry said, shrinking still further into his mother’s body.

“Doctor Mills spoke to me this morning and we reviewed your notes. If you'd like to follow me, I can get you checked into the room. Sidney,” she said, turning to the man hovering nearby, “can you go and find Nurse Belle please. Regina wanted her on this case too.”

The man named Sidney nodded at once and rushed off. Emma briefly wondered whether it was normal for emergency doctors to go to such efforts to make sure patients were seen by specific members of the medical staff but had little time to dwell on that fact before she was following Doctor West through the clean corridors, Henry trotting beside her until they reached the private room.

The decorations in their new room were from Finding Nemo this time and Henry trailed his fingers along Dory’s fin as Emma helped him change into the hospital gown. As she worked, Emma answered some basic questions which Doctor West was asking about Henry’s health since they had left the hospital the previous day. She then helped her son to climb into the large bed and tucked him in, whereby he looked curiously between the two doctors.

“Am I sick?” he asked bluntly, interrupting Emma’s explanation of how Henry had slept the night before.

“Well,” Doctor West said, taking the question in her stride. “We know you have a nasty fever called glandular fever but Doctor Mills thought there was something else wrong with you as well so she asked me to find out.”

“You’re a doctor like Gina?” Henry asked.

“Exactly,” Doctor West said, waggling her stethoscope. “But she doesn’t work in this part of the hospital much so she wanted me to look after you. Is that ok?”

Henry nodded. “Is Gina going to come and see me too?”

“I’m sure that can be arranged,” Doctor West smiled. “And in the meantime, you can call me Zelena. Or Lena, for short if you want.”

Emma and Zelena laughed too, both pleased to see that whatever was wrong with the small boy wasn’t completely getting him down. They left him with the television remote to occupy himself so Zelena and Emma could then sit down and all through the doctor’s plans, theories, and to give Emma an opportunity to ask questions and offer her own opinion of Doctor West’s ideas. Emma was thoroughly impressed with what she heard, even though half of the medical terms meant very little to her. Doctor West explained everything Emma asked for more about and made the blonde relax slightly, knowing her son was in good hands. Just before they were about to return to Henry, Zelena asked Emma if there was anything else she wanted to say.

“Just find out what’s wrong,” Emma said. “I just … yeah, I can’t watch him suffer.”

“Do you think he’s in pain?” Zelena asked.

Emma glanced at her son. “He keeps mentioning that his body feels achy,” she said. “And I know how horrible it is to have a fever. At least he’s not throwing up or anything but yeah, I don’t think he’s comfortable.”

“Achy?” Zelena said.

“Yes but Doctor Mills did a test for meningitis and it came back negative.”

“I know,” Zelena said. “I was with Regina when she got the results. That’s why she asked me to take the case.”

“You guys are friends?”

“We went through medical school together,” Zelena nodded. “I’ve known her since I was five.”

“She’s better, actually,” Zelena said. “But she can’t take the case with her position in A and E. She wanted to though, I could see it in her eyes. I’m sure she’ll come and check on you this evening before her shifts starts.”

Emma couldn’t help but smile. It felt good to at least have doctors treating Henry who not only cared but were also working together to find out what was wrong.

“So,” Emma said. “What do you want to do first?”

“I’m going to put him on a drip again,” she said. “We need to get that fever down and his body stronger because the sooner the glandular symptoms fade, the more easily we’ll be able to identify what else is going on. And then I want to run a couple more blood tests, if that’s ok?”

“Whatever helps,” Emma said. “Just try to limit the number of needles.”

Zelena nodded her understanding. “I’ll do my best.”

Just then, the door opened and a familiar face appeared.

“Hi guys,” Belle said. “Remember me?”

Henry nodded and waved and Emma held out her hand for Belle to shake. The nurse received her orders from Zelena and headed off to find everything the doctor needed whilst Emma and Zelena explained what was going to happen to Henry. Belle, Emma discovered, had a calming effect on her son and he barely batted an eyelid when the Australian attached the drip and got him set up on
his new IV. She then sat with Emma and Henry for a while, chatting away about this and that whilst Zelena did a brief check up and took some blood samples. Emma knew the woman was just distracting her from the doctor prodding and poking her son but she was grateful nonetheless.

Five hours later and Henry was sleeping, most of his dinner still sitting on his plate, his appetite not yet returned. Emma had barely picked at her own food, sick with worry rather than anything else. Doctor West had stopped by earlier to check on them but there was little they could do before the blood work came back. Emma was just settling into her chair to watch a quiz show on television when there was a knock on the door. She stood to open it, rather than shouting out and waking Henry.

“Doctor Mills,” she said, when she saw the figure on the other side of the door. “Hi.”

“Hello,” Regina said. “How are you?”

“Fine,” Emma shrugged.

Regina ignored the fact that the blonde had given her a non-answer. She knew exactly how Emma was. A sick child was every parent’s nightmare. In fact, she made a note to herself to stop asking Emma how she was. Terrible, clearly, was the answer. Not that she looked terrible, Regina mused, glancing at the woman before her. A little pale, perhaps, but otherwise in great physical shape.

“Um, Doctor Mills?”

Regina snapped her eyes back to Emma’s face, forcing the blush from her cheeks. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“I asked how you were,” Emma said.

“Oh, good thanks,” Regina said. “I start my shift in half an hour but I wanted to see how the two of you were settling in, if … if that’s ok?”

Emma smiled. “Of course, thank you for coming. And thank you for recommending Doctor West. She’s great and Henry really likes her.”

“She’s the best, I told you,” Regina said.

“Actually Doctor West said exactly the same about you,” Emma grinned.

Regina rolled her eyes. She and her best friend only ever complimented one another to other people, never face to face. It was nice to be validated, however, although she knew she was a good doctor.

“So, how’s Henry?” Regina asked, catching sight of the boy sleeping over his mother’s shoulder.

“Same, I guess,” Emma said, standing aside so Regina could enter the room. She closed the door and the two of them walked to the bedside, looking down at Henry who lay oblivious to the women watching him. “He sleeps a lot.”

“The fever,” Regina said quietly. “It’s good for him to rest. Don’t worry too much about that.”

“Oh I’m worrying about everything,” Emma scoffed. “Does he have this or that and will the doctors find out in time and what’s going to happen if they don’t and -.”

“Hey,” Regina hissed. “Stop that.”
Emma looked down at the floor, fingernails digging into her palm. Regina hesitated before reaching out and patting Emma’s back comfortingly.

“We’re going to find out what’s wrong with him, Miss Swan, I promise. Doctor West is the best in this department and if I can help out in any way I can, please let me know. But negative thoughts are not going to help. Henry needs you present and positive right now. Don’t let yourself get consumed with thoughts of the worst.”

“The worst?” Emma asked, looking up at last with her green eyes filled with tears. “What’s the worst?”

Regina bit her lip. “We can’t speculate, Miss Swan. Not yet. It won’t do anyone any good.”

“Cancer?”

“We can’t guess at this stage,” Regina repeated. “And I’m not Henry’s doctor, so you really should be discussing this with Doctor West.”

“But you think he might have cancer?” Emma said, stepping away from the bed and beckoning Regina out into the corridor so they could talk without waking Henry. As soon as the door shut behind them, Emma rounded on the doctor. “You think my son has cancer and you didn’t tell me?”

Regina held her hands up defensively. “Woah, Miss Swan, I never said that.”

“You didn’t deny it,” Emma snapped.

Regina sighed and gestured for the desperate mother to sit down. Emma threw herself into the hospital chair and folded her arms, hugging herself tightly as she hunched over so it seemed to Regina like the woman was trying to squeeze herself into nonexistence.

“Miss Swan,” Regina said gently. “I promise you that as soon as Doctor West knows anything, she will tell you. But until that time, it’s really important you don’t allow your imagination to run away with you. I’m not able right now to give you the answers you need but I also know that worrying about something which might never come to pass isn’t going to help everyone.”

“But what if it is,” Emma said, her voice barely more than a whisper. “What if it’s … cancer.”

Regina took a deep breath. “Then we’ll deal with it,” she said. “Henry is in the best place he can be right now, ok? We’re doing all we can for him and as soon as those test results show anything conclusive, we’re gong to be working hard to get him better as quickly as possible.”

Emma nodded but said nothing. She was exhausted, her mind running wild with scenarios of Henry’s sickness as she sat beside the brunette doctor. She knew Doctor Mills was right, she knew she needed to stay positive. But it was much harder to actually do so when she couldn’t get away from the thought of Henry having cancer. Cancer. The big C.

“I have to go,” Regina said quietly after a while. “My shift starts in a few minutes. Can you say hello to Henry from me when he wakes up?”

“Yeah, sure,” Emma said. “Thanks Doctor Mills.”

“Call me Regina,” the brunette offered.

Emma winced. “I’d rather not.”
Eyebrows rose. “Um, ok,” Regina said, getting to her feet. “I guess I’ll be heading off then.”

“No, sorry,” Emma said, jumping to her feet and catching Regina’s wrist. “I didn’t mean I didn’t like your name. It’s … regal.”

Regina couldn’t help but laugh. “Thanks.”

“I just … getting to know your doctors by their first name, it makes me think we might be here for a while,” Emma admitted. “It’s scary. If I keep calling you Doctor Mills, perhaps we’ll be out of here by tomorrow morning. Stupid theory, I know. But I’m grasping at any shred of hope I can right now.”

Regina smiled weakly. “It’s not stupid at all,” she said. “And I very much hope you prove me right and are out of here tomorrow. Good night, Miss Swan.”

She turned and walked down the corridor, clutching her wrist where Emma’s hand had clasped her body, the skin tingling with the residual touch. “Fuck,” she muttered under her breath as she rounded the corner and headed towards A and E.
As soon as Zelena entered the private hospital room that evening, Emma was by her side in an instant, peering down at the blood work on the graph. Not that she could make any sense of it, she realised as she frowned at the numbers and lines which told the medical professionals what was wrong with her son. At least, she hoped they would. Belle smiled sympathetically at the worried mother over Zelena’s shoulder, the nurse accompanying the redhead on most of her visits to Henry to ensure she was up to speed on any developments.

“Doctor Mills said it might be cancer,” Emma whispered, glancing at her sleeping son and then to Zelena and Belle, trying to gauge their reactions.

Zelena’s eyebrows rose not at the statement but at what Emma had accused her colleague of. “Regina said that to you?” It was against hospital policy for any doctor to discuss another doctor’s patient, especially with the mother of a sick child.

“Well, not exactly,” Emma admitted, realising she had almost dropped Regina in it. “I jumped to conclusions and she didn’t deny it. She said I should talk to you. So, is it?”

“No,” Zelena said. “I ran this last blood test for evidence of leukaemia and lymphoma and both came back negative. There’s nothing else in Henry’s work to suggest he has any other form of cancer either.”

Emma let out a sob of relief and rushed back to her son’s bedside, kissing his forehead and causing him to stir for the first time in hours.

“Mum?” he said groggily, roused from his long nap.

“Hi baby,” Emma said. “Sorry I woke you.”

“What time is it?” Henry asked, yawning and looking around the familiar room.

“Just after nine,” Emma said. “It’s ok, go back to sleep. I’m just talking with Doctor West but we’ll be right outside if you need me. Belle’s going to wait here with you until you fall asleep again.”

“Ok, goodnight Lena,” Henry said, waving weakly at the doctor as the nurse took Emma’s vacated chair and began talking to Henry in a soft voice about her favourite Disney movie, Beauty and the Beast.

As soon as the door was closed behind them, Emma leaned against the wall and slid down it, landing heavily on her bum and wrapping her arms around her knees. Zelena hesitated before dropping down too, crouching beside the sobbing mother.

“These test results are good news, Miss Swan,” Zelena assured. “Ruling out cancer is a positive step.”
“I know,” came the mumbled response, Emma’s tear-stained face pressed into the denim covering her legs.

Zelena patted Emma’s shoulder, trying to soothe the desperate mother. She knew Emma was relieved about the fact that her son didn’t have cancer. The only problem was, Zelena’s new suspicion might be far more worrying.

“Miss Swan,” she began tentatively, waiting for Emma to finally look at her before continuing. “I know the family medical history you gave to Doctor Mills was sparse but I would like to take a sample of your blood to see if I can test for something.”

“You want to test me?” Emma asked, wiping her eyes. “You think whatever is wrong with Henry is some genetic disease?”

“I’m beginning to think there’s something we’re not seeing,” Zelena nodded. “The results suggest there’s something problematic in his blood but with no cancers showing up I’m starting to look at rarer causes of these symptoms. Genetic mutations would be the best place to start.”

“But I’m not sick,” Emma said. “Wouldn’t I have been ill too?”

“Not necessarily,” Zelena said. “There are many illnesses which can be dormant in parents but passed down through the generations. Henry could have inherited something from you, his father, or any of his grandparents.”

“But I don’t know where is dad is,” Emma said, throwing her hands up in frustration. “Hell, I don’t even know where my own parents are. What if he didn’t get it from me? What if he inherited it from one of them? What would we do then?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it,” Zelena said simply. “But remember, I need you to stay positive.”

Emma barked out a laugh. “You just told me that you think I’m the reason my son’s sick,” she said, standing up and marching to the end of the corridor where a window looked out over dark London. “How am I supposed to stay positive?”

Zelena waited for a minute and then followed the mother of her patient down the corridor. She leaned beside the blonde and stared out over the city too.

“This isn’t your fault, Miss Swan,” Zelena said quietly. “This is nobody’s fault. Sometimes children get sick and there’s nothing we can do about it. All that matters now is that we work together to find out what is wrong with Henry and make him better as soon as possible. Personally, I think the best plan is to test your blood to see if my theory is correct.”

“What theory?” Emma asked. “What do you think he has?”

“I’d rather not speculate just yet.”

Emma rounded on the doctor, eyes glinting dangerously. “It’s bad, isn’t it? That’s why you’re keeping me in the dark. You don’t want to tell me the truth because Henry’s got some horrible, incurable disease and it’s all my fault.”

Zelena didn’t blink at the anger seething from the mother before her. She was more than used to dealing with parents going through the worst experience of their lives. She knew how to handle it. And Emma might appear angry but the doctor knew that was fuelled by far deeper, more powerful emotions: the pain and worry over her son.
“Telling you my theory won’t help anyone until the test results come back,” Zelena said quietly. “If you’ll let me take a sample now, I should be able to get the results as soon as I come on shift tomorrow afternoon.”

Emma nodded and stuck out her arm, rolling up her sleeve. “Do it.”

Zelena put her own arm around Emma’s shoulder and gently led the woman towards an empty room where she had already placed a blood test kit. She had known, of course, that Emma would consent to the test. She also knew she had made the right decision by not telling this emotional, exhausted, and petrified mother what she suspected was wrong with her son. Not yet, anyway.

As soon as the blood was collected, Zelena headed for the lab and Emma returned to her son, relieving Belle who was tidying the medicines beside Henry’s bed, the boy having fallen asleep again.

“I gave him another paracetamol,” Belle murmured. “And his IV will see him through the night.”

“Thanks,” Emma said flatly, taking her seat once more.

Belle looked sympathetically at the woman before her. She couldn’t imagine what Emma was going through. Zelena had shared her suspicions with Belle before they had entered the room but the nurse had never even heard of the disease before. From what Zelena had said, if her preliminary diagnosis was right, Henry was in for a rough time. His mother too.

“Can I get you anything?” Belle asked kindly.

“No thanks,” Emma said. “I’ll be fine.”

Belle nodded her understanding and left the room, dimming the light as she did so, subtly hinting that Emma too should get some sleep. The blonde needed little persuasion and wrapped the hospital blanket around her legs, settling back in her chair and closing her eyes. Sleep, however, never came.

The plastic gloves snapped off her hands and were tossed into the disposal bin. Her blood-splattered scrubs followed as Regina changed after a particularly difficult case. A hit and run victim had come in to A and E, bleeding internally. As they tried to clamp off the blood flow, she had been covered herself in the bodily fluid. They had managed to save her, however, and the woman was in surgery as they spoke. Regina glanced at the clock and noticed she was due a break. Pulling on a clean set of scrubs, she headed for the hot drink facilities in the corner of the staff room.

“Damn it,” she silently cursed as she unscrewed the lid of the coffee, the empty container glinting teasingly back at her, faint wafts of the grinds permeating the air and making her mouth water.

She slammed the tin back down on the table and headed for the canteen. At least there was still caffeine somewhere in the hospital, she mused. The room was quiet, unsurprising given it was almost four in the morning and she beelined straight for the coffee counter. As she waited for her drink to be made, she leaned against the side, eyes scanning the room. She loved people watching. Her eyes widened slightly when she spotted a familiar figure, however. Collecting her coffee, she made her way to the window where the blonde sat, staring unseeingly in front of her, an empty coffee cup clutched in her hands.

“Miss Swan?” Regina asked, jolting the woman back into the present.
“Oh, Doctor Mills, hi,” Emma said, rubbing her pale face to try and wake herself up a little. “Still working?”

“Another four hours left,” Regina nodded. “May I?” She gestured to the chair opposite the mother. Emma nodded her consent and the brunette sat down. Sipping her coffee, Regina hesitated before speaking.

“How’s Henry?” she asked.

“He doesn’t have cancer,” Emma said. “But now Zelena thinks it’s a genetic disorder or something.”

Regina’s eyebrows rose before she could stop them. She hadn’t had a chance to speak to her best friend before the redhead had clocked off at midnight. She briefly wondered what Zelena’s suspicions were and wished she could see a copy of Henry’s latest results.

“She asked for a blood sample from you?” Regina asked.

Emma nodded. “But she won’t tell me what she’s checking for. Do you know?” she asked suddenly, realising Regina may have spoken to her friend and the two professionals were likely to have discussed a mutual patient.

“No, sorry,” Regina answered. “We didn’t overlap before she went home. And even if she had, you know I can’t discuss it with you. I’m not Henry’s doctor.”

“Then why do you keep coming around?” Emma snapped, tiredness and frustration bubbling over once more. “Why do you keep coming up to see him?”

Regina bit her lip. She had asked that same question too but was sure as hell not going to tell Emma the answer she had admitted to herself.

“I care about my patients, Miss Swan,” she said simply. “Henry is a sweet boy and I wanted to help in any way I could. But if you think me being around is counterproductive, I can take a step back. I’ve already recommended him to the best paediatrician in London and Belle is assigned to him too. If that’s all you wanted from me, if that’s all I can do for the two of you, just say the word and I’ll not come by any more.”

Emma regarded the woman before her, trying to understand exactly what was happening. She could believe Regina felt invested in Henry’s wellbeing. After all, she had treated him that first night. But so too had Doctor Whale and Emma hadn’t seen him since the pair were readmitted.

“Do you check up on all your patients after they leave A and E?” Emma asked.

“Some,” Regina admitted. “Not all.”

“But you want to check up on Henry?”

“I do.”

Emma sighed and buried her face in her hands, Regina reached across the table and patted her shoulder a little awkwardly. Eventually, red-rimmed green eyes peered upwards once more.

“I’m sorry I snapped at you, again,” Emma said. “I’m just exhausted and scared.”

“I know,” Regina said. “But we’re all doing our best for Henry.”
“Thank you,” Emma said quietly. “I just feel so … helpless.”

“So do I,” Regina admitted. “I wish I could have stayed as Henry’s doctor. Zelena’s amazing but, well, she’s not me.”

Emma couldn’t help but chuckle at the statement. She knew doctors had a reputation for being a little bigheaded but she also suspected in Regina’s case it was entirely justified. Emma wasn’t quite sure what had given her the impression but she was fairly confident that Regina was one of the best doctors in London.

“Thank you for taking an interest in Henry,” Emma said. “It means a lot to me that both you and Doctor West are working so hard. And it’s ok if you still want to come and see him before or after your shifts. He likes you and anything to cheer him up is priceless right now.”

“How is he doing?” Regina asked.

“He’s tired all the time,” Emma said, eyes filling with tears. “And he’s in pain, I can tell. But there’s nothing anyone can do about it.”

Without thinking, Regina moved to sit besides Emma, pulling the blonde into her arms. Emma sobbed into the previously clean scrubs, her tears soaking into the soft material as she wept for her son, lying in the bed three floors above them.

“We’ll find out what’s wrong with him, Miss Swan,” Regina promised. “We will find out what is wrong with Henry.”

“What if you don’t?” Emma asked, the questioned muffled into the doctor’s shoulder. “What if you can’t find out in time, Regina? What then?”

The brunette flinched when the younger woman used her name. After all, it had been less than ten hours earlier that Emma had refused to drop their formalities, convinced that doing so would trap her son in hospital for even longer. The fact that his mother had resigned herself to the fact that Henry was going to be there for a while made Regina’s heart ache. She also ignored Emma’s questions. They didn’t need to go down that road just yet.

“Is there someone I can call for you?” she offered. “Do you have someone who can come and sit with you? No mother should go through this alone.”

“I don’t want to disturb people,” Emma said. “It’s the middle of the night.”

“They’d want to be here for you, Emma,” Regina said, testing the reciprocal name use. The blonde didn’t seem to react. “That’s what friends and family are for.”

“My foster parents live in Bristol,” Emma said. “I haven’t even told them we’re back in hospital.”

“Do you have anyone closer?”

Emma nodded but shrugged. “They have to work tomorrow.”

Regina sighed. “Emma, it’s ok to be a little selfish sometimes. If you need someone, if you need support, you must ask for it. You’re no good to Henry if you’re not able to be strong for him. Externally, at least. Now, is there anyone I can call for you?”

“Do you have her number?”

Silently, Emma pulled out her phone, found Ruby’s number and handed it over. She knew she could have called her friend herself but she also knew she wouldn’t have been able to really express what was happening. She listened, however, as Regina calmly explained to a sleepy Ruby who she was, what was happening at the hospital, and that Emma could do with a friend.

“She’ll be fifteen minutes,” Regina said, handing the phone back at the end of the call. “She also said Billy will bring you guys breakfast from Granny’s. I assume that means something to you.”

Emma couldn’t help but smile. “Ruby’s gran runs a cafe on Clapham High Street,” she said. “It’s my favourite place in the world. They do the best bear claws I’ve ever had in my life.”

“Well then at least you have one thing to look forward to,” Regina said, glancing at the clock on the wall. “I have to get back to work now, but if you need anything, anything at all, just let me know.”

Reaching into her pocket, Regina pulled out her card. She rarely handed out her details, especially to people already checked into the hospital and being cared for by her best friend. But she got the impression Emma wasn’t the sort of person to admit weakness easily and if she was able to do that in front of Regina, even just a little, perhaps she could help.

“Thanks,” Emma said. “For everything.”

“Of course,” Regina said, patting Emma’s hand before she stood up. “I mean it, Emma. Any time of the day or night, just call or text.”

Emma nodded her understanding, turning the card over mindlessly between her fingers. She heard Regina walk away, shoes squeaking slightly on the canteen floor. Her thumb traced over the embossed name several times before she slipped the card into her pocket and stood up. Slowly, she headed to the reception to wait for her best friend who would be arriving soon. She hadn’t wanted to call Ruby, not in the middle of the night at least. But she couldn’t deny as she watched the redhead rushing up the steps and throwing her arms around her trembling body, she was in desperate need of a hug.

When the two friends crept into the room almost an hour later, Henry was still asleep. The on-duty nurse, Ashley, had been checking on the little boy regularly and he hadn’t once woken. Emma had filled Ruby in over another cup of coffee in the canteen, telling her everything which had happened since they had left their apartment the previous afternoon. Ruby’s eyes swam with tears as soon as Emma had even said the word cancer and she had breathed a sigh of relief when the mother had assured her the results had come back negative. Now, however, she too was wondering, just as Emma was, what else could possibly be wrong with the boy she considered her nephew.

“Don’t Google it,” Emma had warned on their way back to the private room, Ruby speculating as to what the genetic disease could be. “You know that’s not going to do any good.”

And so the two women sat side by side for the rest of the night, unable to tear their eyes away from the pale little face sticking out over the edge of the blanket. They didn’t speak, there was no need to say anything. They both knew what the other was thinking. And neither wanted to say anything which might wake Henry, nor for him to overhear any of their dark speculations.

Soon after seven, brown eyes cracked open. He blinked a few times, confused at the appearance of Ruby in his hospital bedroom but he managed a weak smile, his head lifting off the pillow as he
began to wake up.

“Hi Ruby,” he said, his voice hoarse from sleep.

“Hey, my little man,” Ruby said, moving to sit on the edge of the bed after a nod from Emma that it was ok. “Did you sleep well?”

Henry nodded and pushed himself upright, wincing slightly as the blanket nudged the IV drip still attached to his hand. Emma passed him a cup of water and helped him sip from the straw before arranging the cushions behind him so he could sit up.

“Are we going home today?” Henry asked his mother.

“I don’t know,” Emma admitted. “We have to wait and see what the doctor says.”

“When?”

“I don’t know that either,” Emma admitted.

Doctor West had said she was going to try and rush Emma’s blood test but the results wouldn’t be back before midday at the earliest. And the other doctor assigned to Henry’s case was perfectly nice but Emma knew he had other patients and had appeared somewhat less invested in finding out what was wrong with Henry.

“How are you feeling?” Emma asked, trying to avoid any more awkward questions from her son.

“Hot,” Henry said. “Still. I thought this liquid was supposed to make me feel better.” He pouted up at the IV bag as if it personally was responsible for his glandular fever.

“It’s helping your body fight your sickness,” Emma said, wishing she could take away his discomfort. “Do you want a paracetamol?”

Henry nodded and Emma passed him the pill, helping him swallow it down with another drink of water. The coated tablet slid thickly down his throat, getting stuck part way down so he had to take another gulp to wash it away. He grimaced.

“I want to go home,” he said, putting on his most innocent face against which Emma had little defence. Usually.

Emma’s heart broke as she looked into her son’s pleading eyes. She wanted nothing more than to scoop him up and run out of the hospital and back to their flat where she could shut the door and they could curl up together and pretend everything was alright. But it wasn’t alright. And she knew that. The only problem was, Henry didn’t.

“Henry, my darling, we can’t leave until the doctors know what’s wrong with you,” Emma said, her voice choked. She heard Ruby shift uncomfortably on the bed, not wanting to be privy to the delicate family conversation. “As soon as Doctor West comes back and tells me what’s wrong then we can help you get better even quicker and you’ll be home before you know it.”

“Tonight?” Henry asked, face hopeful.

Emma bit her lip. “I can’t say,” she admitted. “We have to wait for Doctor West.”

Henry sunk back into his pillow and folded his arms, taking care to avoid touching his IV. Emma reached to ruffle his hair but he moved away and her fingers were left in mid-air, trembling.
“Do you want some breakfast?” Ruby offered, trying to diffuse the obvious tension as she glanced at her phone.

Emma shook her head and so did Henry.

“Well, that’s too bad because Billy’s outside and he’s got your favourites from Granny’s!”

Emma tried to smile but her lips seemed to be heavy. It was like the muscles had forgotten how to move in that way. Henry too, barely reacted. His appetite still wasn’t anything like what it had been before he got sick. Emma found it hard to believe this was the same six year old who had eaten eight roast potatoes on Christmas Day followed by two slices of cake just one week earlier.

When Billy arrived, the mood did at least lighten a little. The man was always jovial and even Henry grinned a little when he was presented with a hot chocolate and a ham and cheese croissant. The mechanic was already dressed for work and assured his girlfriend the garage could manage without her for the day and that she was to stay with Emma for as long as she needed.

“Thanks Billy,” she said, smiling gratefully at the man who had become one of her closest friends since the two of them began dating.

“Any time. You know you could have called yourself last night? Freaked Ruby right out when the doctor phoned. She thought you were sick too.”

“Yeah, why didn’t you call me?” Ruby asked. “You know I would have come with you yesterday afternoon had you asked.”

“It was the middle of the night,” Emma reasoned. “I didn’t want to disturb you but eventually Regina persuaded me I needed someone. She was right, by the way.”

“Regina?” Ruby frowned.

“Doctor Gina,” Henry piped up from the bed where he had been nibbling a corner of his breakfast. “She was my first doctor but now I have Doctor Lena.”

Ruby and Billy both frowned at the little boy and then up at his mother.

“Doctor Mills who phoned me is the doctor you saw in A and E?” Ruby asked. “Why was she calling me now then?”

Emma shrugged. “We ran into each other in the canteen last night,” she explained. “Doctor Mills has been following Henry’s progress. She wants to know he’s ok.”

“Doctor Mills?” Billy asked. “Or Regina.”

“Either, I guess,” Emma said. “She said I could call her Regina but I refused at first. Calling doctors by their first names makes it seem like we’ll be here a while.”

She glanced at Henry but he wasn’t listening, too busy blowing carefully across the surface of his hot chocolate to realise his mother had just given him a clue as to his earlier question. No, they probably wouldn’t be home that night.

The four of them ate their breakfast in silence. Well, Ruby and Billy ate. Emma picked at the bear claw, unable to stomach her favourite food for the first time ever. She did however drink down her coffee, relishing the bitter taste it left on her tongue. Henry handed back most of his croissant
and half of the hot chocolate before settling down to watch morning cartoons. Just as Sponge Bob Square Pants was about to cause Billy to rip the television from the wall, there was a knock at the door.

“Doctor Gina,” Henry smiled as the brunette’s head appeared around the frame.

Both Billy’s and Ruby’s jaws hit the floor as the beautiful woman stepped into the room. Emma, however, didn’t notice.

“Hi, have you just finished your shift?” Emma asked, beckoning the doctor inside.

“About ten minutes ago,” Regina nodded. “Hi,” she added, nodding at Ruby and Billy. “You must be Ruby.”

She held out her hand for the redhead to shake but it wasn’t until Emma elbowed her gobsmacked friend in the ribs that her own arm shot out and met the waiting hand.

“Hi, yes,” Ruby said. “Sorry, long night.”

“I apologise for waking you,” Regina said. “You too, Billy. But I could tell Emma wasn’t going to call you herself and I thought someone should be here with her.”

“I was here,” Henry pointed out. He had been listening with interest to see if any mention of going home could be deciphered within the adult conversation.

“Yes you were,” Regina said, turning to the boy with a smile. “But seeing as you have me and Doctor West looking after you, I thought maybe someone else should take care of your mum.”


He looked up at Emma, suddenly concerned.

“No, no, I’m fine,” the blonde assured. “But sometimes it’s nice to have friends around, isn’t it? When you’re feeling sad.”

“Sad?” Henry asked. “Why are you sad?”

Emma let out a watery chuckle. “Because you’re sick, kiddo,” she reminded him. “It makes me sad when you’re sick.”

Henry frowned. “Well that’s stupid,” he announced. “Shouldn’t I be sad? I’m the sick one.”

All four adults chuckled at that and Henry pouted at the knowledge that he was the butt of their joke. Emma, however, was also immensely relieved that despite his illness, her son’s mood appeared not to have been dampened. His energy levels were lower than usual, sure, but other than that his personality remained intact.

“Well, I’d better go,” Regina said. “I need to get some sleep before I’m back on shift tonight.”

“Another night shift?” Emma asked. “Wow, they work you hard.”

“Last one in a run of four,” Regina said. “Then I’ll be off for a few days to recover.”

Emma could never have been a doctor. Not least because she spectacularly failed her science GCSE but because she was far too fond of sleep. Although she had been struggling to successfully have even a nap since Henry had gotten ill.
“Well, I guess we’ll see you tonight,” Emma said. “Thanks for stopping by.”

“Of course,” Regina said. “Lovely to meet you two,” she added, nodding to Ruby and Billy. “See you later, Henry.”

“Bye,” the boy said, already watching television once more.

As soon as the door closed behind the doctor, both Ruby and Billy turned in unison to Emma, eyebrows raised.

“What?” she asked, confused by their expressions.

“That,” Ruby said, “is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.”


“OK!” Emma interrupted loudly. “I get what you’re saying. So what?”

“So - so what?” Ruby stuttered. “Emma, are you stupid? Look at her! She’s totally your type.”

“Shut up,” Emma said, punching her friend lightly in the arm.

“Ems, she’s not even Henry’s doctor any more and yet she’s still visiting. What do you think she’s doing coming up here to see him twice a day?”

“She’s a doctor,” Emma said slowly. “She’s doing her job.”

Ruby and Billy both laughed. “Yeah, fairly sure her boss would not be happy if he knew the real reason she was coming up here and it’s not to check on Henry, at least, not entirely.”

“Well of course it is,” Emma replied. “How do you know she’s even into women?”

Ruby and Billy glanced at one another. “Oh we know,” they said in unison.

“She was totally checking you out,” Billy said.

“She was, Mum,” Henry added.

Emma blushed and looked down at her son, wondering when he had tuned back into their conversation. She was also embarrassed to think he might have picked up on the way she had been sneaking glances at the brunette. And, even worse, that he had spotted Regina doing the same to her. She shook that thought from her mind.

“Henry, it’s not like that with Doctor Mills, ok?”

“Why not?” Henry asked simply. “It’s been ages since Lily left. And I like Gina. She’s nice to me now she’s stopped poking me with needles.”

Emma sighed and patted Henry’s shoulder. “Come on,” she said. “I think you should rest.”

“But Ruby and Billy are here,” Henry protested.

“Actually, they’re just leaving,” Emma said, glancing pointedly at her friends.

Taking their cue to leave, Ruby and Billy said goodbye to Henry and Ruby made Emma promise to call her as soon as she knew anything. Despite being annoyed at her friends’ inappropriate
accusations, Emma agreed, knowing how important Henry was to Ruby and that it would have been spiteful to have refused. Soon after the door closed behind her two friends, Henry’s eyes drifted shut. Emma watched him sleep for a while, wishing she could do the same. But she couldn’t. Every time she closed her eyes, pictures of Henry with tubes stuck out of his body swam into her mind and she jolted awake. Well, that or an image of a certain brunette doctor. Either way, Emma wasn’t going to sleep any time soon.
A/N: ok, here’s the big reveal for what’s wrong with Henry. Now, some of you might think this is rather fast considering the title of the fic but Emma and Regina are soon going to be on the tail of a new mystery …

Zelena hated to admit it to herself but she did delay the moment when she finally headed to the lab to pick up Emma Swan’s blood work. It wasn’t that she was wasting time: her other patients needed attention too. But she definitely asked more questions than usual and tidied up her entire work station before she could no longer put off the task she had been dreading since the start of her shift.

She wasn’t sure what she was most afraid of; the results returning positive and proving her theory correct, or them being negative once again and the mystery of Henry’s illness becoming even more impenetrable. she was rapidly running out of theories and ideas of what to test for next. Knowing what was wrong with the small boy was better, surely … It was just the circumstances of the little family which made her stomach feel like lead as she finally entered the lab and asked for the file.

Opening the flap as soon as the document was handed to her, grey-blue eyes scanned the paper quickly, heart pounding as she took in the results.

“Shit,” she murmured.

“Yeah, poor woman,” a passing lab technician said. “I’ve never even heard of the disease you asked us to test for but my superior gave me the details. It sounds brutal. Is it treatable?”

“There’s a chance of survival, yes,” Zelena said thickly. “But she’s not actually suffering. It’s her son. Do you have Henry Swan’s results here too?”

The technician turned and thumbed through the pile of files he had yet to order before finally pulling one free. Zelena had asked for the test to be run in tandem on Henry’s blood work, just in case Emma tested positive herself but hadn’t passed on the disease. Opening the second file, Zelena saw the result she finally realised she had most been dreading.

A distant ringing sound roused Regina from her sleep. Groaning, she burrowed her face into her soft pillow, stretching out her body before she finally raised her hand from beneath the warm covers and reached for her phone on the bedside table. Without looking at the caller ID, she answered.

“Yeah?”

“Were you asleep?” came the familiar voice.

“Of course I was, Zee. I’m on nights, remember?” Regina said, irritated at her best friend’s apparent short-term memory problems and her interrupted rest.

“Right, sorry,” Zelena said, not sounding in the least bit apologetic. “Um, I just wanted to give you
a heads up that I’ve diagnosed Henry Swan. I’m just on my break and then I’m going to tell his mother.”

Regina suddenly sat bolt upright, wide awake and alert. “What is it? What does he have?”

By the time Zelena had finished explaining to Regina how she had picked up on the subtle signs of the rare disease, Regina was already dressed again and heading for the door, phone tucked between her cheek and shoulder as she fumbled her feet into her shoes.

“Give me ten minutes,” Regina said, grabbing her car keys and unlatching the door. “I want to be there when you tell her.”

Henry pouted as the dice landed on the board and his mother moved her own counter triumphantly forwards once more, leaving his woefully behind. Well, this wasn’t fair. He was sick, after all, so why wasn’t she letting him win? A little irritated, he leaned forwards stiffly to roll the dice himself, beaming when his throw gained him a double six. Counting out carefully, Henry grinned as he realised all was not lost.

“Are you hungry?” Emma asked as she took her next go and looked at her thin, pale son huddled beneath the hospital blankets.

“No,” Henry replied.

“But you hardly ate any lunch,” Emma pointed out, indicating the almost intact lasagne that had been served by a nurse earlier. Henry had barely eaten anything since they had arrived in hospital and was definitely starting to weaken as a result.

“I didn’t like it,” Henry protested. “And I wasn’t hungry anyway.”

“Kid, you need to eat,” Emma sighed, handing the dice back to her son. “The drip isn’t enough to make you get better. It’s good healthy food which will make you strong again.”

Henry glanced around the room at the fruit and chocolates which Billy, Ruby and even Belle had brought him over the past two days. None of it really appealed to him but he knew his mother was worried so he acquiesced.

“I’ll have an apple,” he said finally. “But cut up into little boat wedges.”

Obliging at once, Emma hopped off the bed and headed straight for a pile of succulent red apples. Ignoring the fact that she knew the fruit would have accumulate a sickening number of air miles, she took a knife from her own empty lunch plate, wiped it clean and began to cut. Upon returning to the bed a few minutes later, Emma frowned at the game board.

“Henry,” she scolded. “What did I say about cheating?”

Big brown eyes looked innocently back. “I didn’t cheat,” he said, the corner of an apple boat entering his mouth. “You just forgot you were losing before.”

Emma laughed but didn’t press the matter. Anything to make her sick son happy was fine by her. So she resumed her seat on the bed and finished the game, allowing Henry his triumph despite its questionable roots. She was also pleased to see he had eaten most of the apple and was about to praise him for doing so when a knock on the door made her turn around.

“Come in,” she called, slipping from the bed and straightening her sweatpants which had gone
saggy at the knee after she had worn nothing else for two days straight. She forgot all about her appearance, however, when two familiar people appeared in the room.


“Hi Henry,” the two women chorused, fake smiles plastered on their face fooling no one in the room but the small boy.

“You have the results?” Emma asked, face drained of colour.

“We do,” Zelena said, glancing at Regina. She hadn’t asked why her friend had insisted on joining her to break the news. If she was honest, she was glad of the support. “Would you like to come down to my office? I think we’d be more comfortable talking there. I’ll ask Belle to come and sit with Henry.”

Emma blinked, unable to reply. No, she thought. This can’t be happening. They can’t be about to tell her what she had been dreading. There was no way she was spending a second away from her son if …

“No,” she all but whispered. “Tell me now.”

Zelena and Regina exchanged looks and imperceptible nods. Each doctor took a seat but Emma remained standing, leaning heavily against Henry’s bed and suddenly feeling like she would collapse were it not there to prop her up.

“Do you want us to tell Henry as well?” Zelena asked, needing to know how to phrase the news.

“The basics, if that’s appropriate,” Emma nodded, her fingers drifting towards Henry’s hand and clasping it. The small boy didn’t seem to mind. He was watching both the doctors curiously, trying to understand what was going on.

“Do you know what’s wrong with me?” he asked at last, breaking the heavy silence.

“We do,” Zelena said.

“Am I going to get better?” Henry said simply.

There was a tense pause. “Hopefully,” Zelena said at last. “Henry, you have something called X-linked Lymphoproliferative Disease and it means your body finds it difficult to make you better if you get ill.”


“X-linked Lymphoproliferative. It’s a very rare genetic disease,” Zelena explained. “One of the earliest symptoms however is an extreme case of glandular fever and combining that with Henry’s peculiar blood work and his stiffness symptoms made me suspicion.”

“So what is it?” Emma asked.

“Henry has a weakened immune system,” Zelena repeated. “His antibodies are very low and his body is going to struggle to defeat illnesses such as glandular fever.”

Emma slumped back against the bed. “So … what can we do? I mean, what does that mean?”

“Well,” Regina began, speaking for the first time, “you’re lucky Doctor West caught this so early. With a diagnosis in good time and before the development of lymphoma, Henry can -.”
“Lymphoma?” Emma interrupted. “Cancer?”

“I have cancer?” Henry piped up, recognising the word from television as something bad which he didn’t quite understand.

“No, you don’t,” Zelena said at once. “And hopefully we’re going to make you all better before that ever happens.”

“Yes,” Regina said, continuing what she had been saying. “In early diagnosis cases such as these, Henry’s chances of making a full recovery are much higher, provided we move quickly.”

“What chances?” Emma asked. “What are the statistics?”

“The current survival rate is thirty per cent,” Zelena admitted, glancing towards Henry to see if he had understood. He wasn’t even listening, too busy making a pair of apple boats race around the plate.

“Thirty,” Emma repeated, the number caught in her throat.

Thirty per cent survival. Which meant seventy per cent of people diagnosed … she couldn’t allow her mind to head down that road just yet. Instead, she swallowed thickly and looked between Regina and Zelena.

“What now?” she asked. “How do we make him better?”

“A bone marrow transplant can offer a cure for early diagnosis cases and this is certainly one of those. You’re lucky you brought Henry in so quickly after he went down with glandular fever. He’s still strong enough to be eligible for a transplant. But there is one problem which we’re going to need to overcome first.”

“Problem?” Emma asked, instinctively looking at Regina for the answer even though it was Zelena, Henry’s official doctor, who had been talking before.

Regina hesitated before answering. She didn’t want to step on Zelena’s toes professionally but the pleading look on Emma’s face compelled her to break the news.

“Since you passed on the defective chromosome to Henry in the first place, you’re going to be ineligible as a donor,” she said gently. “And because of your … family situation, there’s no obvious second choice which means we’re going to have to put Henry on a list and wait for a match.”

Emma’s eyes burned as she realised what Regina was telling her. Not only was she the cause of her son’s sickness in the first place but the fact that she had herself been too unlovable as a baby and then slept casually around as a young adult meant Henry had no other familial match upon whom he might be able to depend for a transplant. Because of her, Henry’s chances of survival just went way down.

Without speaking, Emma ran from the room, hand covering her mouth to stop the sob escaping before she had reached the corridor. Regina and Zelena watched her leave before turning back to the confused boy on the bed.

“Where did Mum go?” he asked, frowning at the closed door.

“She just needs some time to think,” Regina said.
“About me being sick?”

“Yes,” Zelena replied. “But she’ll be back really soon and then we can start working out how to make you better. Have you eaten much today?”

Henry shrugged and nodded towards the left-over lasagne. “I usually like lasagne but that stuff was gross,” he announced. “The apple was ok, though. But I’m not really hungry much at the moment.”

“It’s important you eat,” Zelena said. “The stronger you are, the quicker we’ll be able to get you out of here and back home.”

“Can I leave today?” Henry asked, face lighting up at the prospect.

“No,” Zelena said sadly. “There are some things us doctors will need to do with you first. Would you like me to talk to you about what’s going to happen?”

Although Zelena usually preferred to speak to children with their parents present, Henry was a bright young boy and Emma herself had consented to the pair of them being told about his illness together. She figured she would be able to explain what was wrong with him and the treatment whilst Regina was tracking down Emma and talking to her. Clearly the two of them had a connection and it seemed only logical to send her friend after the devastated mother.

So as Zelena pulled her chair up to the side of Henry’s bed and began to explain in simple language what the disease meant and what their plan for the transplant was, Regina slipped from the room in search of a certain blonde.

The wall was cool against Emma’s back but apart from that she felt numb. Her mind, so overwhelmed with the deluge of information it had just received, was unable to register anything more. It wasn’t sinking in. She wasn’t able to comprehend what Doctor West and Regina had told her. It couldn’t be true, could it? Not Henry. Not her kind, sweet, perfect little boy who had never been ill in his life. And even if it was true, it couldn’t be because of her, could it? Emma bit the inside of her cheek, forcing away a wave of her own guilt. This was not about her. It was about Henry. Her only son.

There was a creek as the door to the bathroom swung open. Emma gulped down lungfuls of air, trying to stop her sobbing. She heard someone walk into the cubicle next to hers, go to the toilet, and leave. Once she was alone again, fresh tears flowed down her cheeks, soaking into her knees as she buried her face against her legs.

Not Henry, not Henry, not Henry.

Their life had been pretty great. Not perfect, but good. After Lily left, Emma had picked up the pieces as best she could and focused all her energy on her son and giving him the stability and love he deserved. She was determined he was never going to get attached to another parent-figure upon whom she couldn’t rely. That was why she hadn’t dated even though it had been over two years since Lily left. He didn’t deserve to be walked out on ever again. And now … well, now it might be Henry who was leaving Emma.

As the realisation of what they were about to face washed over her, Emma’s cries bounced off the bathroom tiles and she collapsed fully onto the floor, curled up a ball and sobbing uncontrollably. She didn’t even hear the door open nor the footsteps approaching the far side of the cubicle door before a gentle knock on the wood was followed by her name.

“Emma?”
She would know that husky voice anywhere. She couldn’t face Regina now. Not like this. She couldn’t face a doctor who knew she was the reason her son was ill. What would the brunette think of her? This mother who had made her son so sick and couldn’t even provide him with a family who could help. Emma was a disgrace, an unfit mother.

“Emma,” Regina repeated. “Please let me in.”

“No,” came the choked response.

Regina sighed and leaned against the door, relieved at least that she had correctly identified the woman whom she had heard crying from the corridor as she walked past during her search.

“Emma, we can talk about this. I can help, but please come out so we can go somewhere private and talk face to face.”

There was no response, just more crying. Regina slid down the wall and sat with her back against it, waiting. Eventually, the sobs began to quieten and a rustling implied Emma was moving. After another few minutes, the latch slid back and the door slowly swung inwards, revealing Emma sat in the same position as Regina, eyes red and face blotchy.

“Come on,” Regina said, getting to her feet and helping Emma to hers. “Let’s go and find a room so we can talk.”

Without a word, Emma allowed herself to be led from the bathroom and down the corridor until Regina located a vacant family room and steered the silent woman inside. Emma sank into a soft chair, staring straight ahead. Assuring Emma she’d be right back, Regina rushed to the canteen to buy two coffees before returning. In the five minutes she had been gone, Emma hadn’t moved. Regina doubted she had even blinked. With a coffee on the table in front of each of them, Regina sat opposite the stupefied blonde and, eventually, their eyes met.

“Hey,” Regina said gently. “We’re going to get through this, Emma.”

The blonde didn’t reply. She just waited for Regina to say more. So she did.

“Henry’s early diagnosis has given us a great chance. We have a few months in which to find him a donor and we will start doing so immediately. The problem is, however, that in the absence of a familial match, he is going to have to go on the transplant list and wait for a random match. Henry also has a blood type which can only receive transplants from a donor of the same group, O negative. This is going to make it harder to find a donor but we can’t give up hope already, Emma. Now we know what’s wrong, we are going to do everything we can to make Henry better.”

Still there was no response. Regina reached forwards and took one of Emma’s hands. The skin was cold and clammy.

“Emma, do you have any questions?”

There was a long silence but Regina could tell there was something the blonde wanted to say so she waited patiently.

“Why?”

The single word was barely a whisper and Regina frowned in confusion. “Why what?”

“Why him?” Emma suddenly spat, pulling her hand from Regina’s and standing up. “Why Henry? Why my son? Why did it have to be him?”
“That’s not a question you need to ask right now,” Regina said, watching the young mother carefully.

“Because the answer is me, you mean?” Emma all but shouted. “I’m the reason he’s ill, right? I’m the fuck-up who passed on some faulty gene to my son and now he’s sick. If it wasn’t for me, if I hadn’t been such a slut that night I would never have killed my son.”

“Hey,” Regina said, jumping to her feet. “Don’t talk like that. He’s not dead, Emma, and regardless of what happened that night, it gave you Henry, right? He’s a gift and he’s lucky to have you for his mother. With you by his side, he can fight this.”

“How?” Emma yelled. “I can’t! I’m toxic to him. I made him ill. And his father, fuck knows where he is. I don’t even know his last name! Just that he’s a good shag and didn’t have the manners to say goodbye the morning after.” Regina blushed but Emma didn’t notice. She just kept going, anger seething from every pore. “And as for his grandparents, I was such a disappointment to them that they gave me up when I was a few hours old. Every person who could have helped I drove away. I’m the only one he has and I’m the reason he’s dying in the first place.”

“He’s not dying, Emma,” Regina said, crossing the room and gripping Emma firmly by the upper arms, ignoring the feel of the toned muscles beneath her fingers. “You have to stay positive.”

“Thirty per cent survival,” Emma repeated. “Thirty fucking per cent, Regina. And with no family and an incompatible blood group that drops to what, five?”

“I don’t know the exact figure,” Regina admitted. “But we can’t give up hope. We haven’t even begun to look for a match.”

“So we’re just going to sit around and hope some good samaritan who just so happens to be a match for Henry donates their bone marrow? How am I supposed to be hopeful about something so unlikely?”

“Because hope is all we have,” Regina said shaking Emma lightly. “We have to hope, Emma. We have to believe that Henry is going to get through this.”

“And what if he doesn’t?” Emma asked, tears pooling in her eyes as the wave of anger receded as fast as it had come replaced by overwhelming grief and despair. “What if we don’t get a match? What if he …”

Regina didn’t know what to say in answer to the uncompleted sentence so she did the only thing she hoped would make Emma feel just a little bit better. She pulled the distraught mother into her arms and hugged her as tightly as she could, the blonde’s tearful face buried against her neck. She felt her own eyes burn but bit back the tears. Emma needed her to be strong right now. She needed support. She needed Regina to be her doctor, nothing more, she reminded herself as she felt Emma’s quavering body pressed tightly against her own.
By the time Regina finished her night shift the following morning, she was exhausted. Luckily she hadn’t been busy and she had been able to steadily treat and correctly diagnose everyone who had arrived in A and E. But now, as she slipped off her scrubs and pulled on her winter coat, a wave of tiredness overwhelmed her. She didn’t begrudge Zelena for waking her the day before, far from it. She was immensely glad she had been able to be there when Emma and Henry had been told about the boy’s illness. In fact, there was one more stop she needed to make before she finally headed back to her penthouse for a much needed sleep.

She entered Henry’s private room quietly, the curtains still drawn at the windows suggesting both Swans were yet to wake. Emma was curled up in the chair, a blanket tucked up under her chin but her right hand reaching out towards Henry. The boy too was sleeping, his left arm extended and hanging off the bed mere inches from where his mother’s fingers were. Regina couldn’t help but smile at the sight.

Not wanting to wake either of them, Regina checked Henry’s charts which had been taken through the night and readjusted his IV bag. Satisfied that there was nothing more she could do, Regina headed for the door. Just before she reached it, a croaky voice from behind her made her turn around.

“Hey.”

“Hi,” Regina said, smiling at Emma who was rubbing her eyes sleepily. “I was just coming to check on Henry. I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

Emma glanced at her phone and her eyebrows rose when she saw what time it was. She hadn’t slept for such a long stretch of time since New Year’s Day. Whether it was simply the exhaustion catching up with her or because at least now they had a diagnosis, she wasn’t sure. Either way, Emma was feeling a little more refreshed for the first time in almost a week. Glancing at her still sleeping son, she bundled up the blanket and stood from the chair, crossing the room and leading the way out into the corridor. Regina followed.

“How are you?” Regina asked as the two of them sank into the chairs outside the room.

Emma shrugged and yawned. “My foster parents are travelling up from Bristol today. They’re going to get a test to see if they’re a match for Henry.”

“Good,” Regina said. “Despite being a difficult blood type because you can only receive a transplant from the same group, O is one of the most common blood groups so if you have people willing to get tested, Henry’s in with a great chance.”

“Yeah, Doctor West said that yesterday,” Emma replied.
It hadn’t been why she had called her foster parents. She had known she needed to tell them sooner or later that Henry was ill. But she had wanted to wait until they had a diagnosis to avoid the endless questions and speculations. At least now they knew what was wrong her foster parents would be able to lend her some kind of support. She wasn’t holding out hope of them being a match but the fact that they at once offered to be tested had been a huge relief.

“Did you sleep ok last night?” Regina asked, noting that Emma looked a little better than the day before.

“Yeah, better than usual,” Emma nodded. “Henry too. And he ate his dinner yesterday. Doctor West said we should be able to go home this afternoon if he keeps eating. There’s nothing more they can do for him here until we get a bone marrow transplant option and we both agreed Henry would be happier there.”

“I think that sounds like a good idea,” Regina said. “There’s no point you both waiting here when it could be weeks or even months before a transplant becomes available.”

Emma nodded and swallowed thickly. The thought of being in this suspended state of terror for the next few months suddenly hit her. She had thought that after the diagnosis the treatment and cure would come quickly. But she was slowly realising that Henry could be waiting a long time for a bone marrow transplant that was suitable. She wished her foster parents would hurry up and arrive so they could be tested. She knew it was a long shot but it was the first step.

“We’ll find one for him, Emma,” the doctor said, perfectly reading the emotions on the young mother’s face.

Emma nodded but said nothing. She couldn’t, not without crying again. And Regina had seen her cry far too much over the past twenty-four hours.

“Are you heading home now?” Emma asked, changing the subject.

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “I have three days off now and then I’m back on day shifts.”

“Oh,” Emma said, suddenly realising she had gotten used to seeing the brunette doctor twice a day and that a little part of their hospital routine was about to disappear. “Well, good. You deserve a break.”

“So do you,” Regina said. “When was the last time you left this hospital?”

Emma shrugged. She genuinely couldn't remember but it had to be at least two days ago.

“Do you want me to sit with Henry whilst you go and take a walk outside? It’s important to get some fresh air, you know. You need to keep on top of your own health if you’re going to be there for Henry.”

“Do you mind?” Emma asked.

“Of course not,” Regina reassured. “Take as long as you need.”

Emma smiled gratefully and stood up, stretching. Regina looked away as a sliver of pale, flat stomach appeared when Emma’s sweater rode upwards.

“I’ll be back soon,” Emma said before setting off down the corridor.
The cold morning air bit at her skin and Emma wrapped her arms protectively around her body as she stepped outside. She instantly regretted not having brought her coat. Even though London wasn’t the cleanest city, she took a deep breath, savouring the comparative freshness outside the hospital. The smell of disinfectant had become commonplace for her. Hands jammed into her sweatpants’ pockets and shoulders hunched, she set off around the hospital.

The car park was quiet, her own yellow bug gaudily standing out a mile amongst the few dotted vehicles. Doctors and nurses were coming and going for their shift changes and occasional patients and family members could be seen too. Emma kept her head down as she began to walk. At the corner of the building, Emma was pleased to see a small pavement which ran along the next wall and followed it, deciding a couple of laps of the building would be enough. She didn’t want too long alone to think.

The cold air had woken her up and her brain was already going over everything which had happened the day before. After Regina had eventually calmed her down, the two of them had talked for over an hour about Henry’s diagnosis, the treatment and what to expect over the coming days. Emma knew Regina wasn’t his doctor but she couldn’t deny that she was glad it was the brunette who had explained everything to her. She liked Doctor West and Henry did too. But for some reason she felt more comfortable around Regina, even after Ruby and Billy’s observations.

She had forced herself not to think about what her two friends and Henry had said. She herself hadn’t noticed the doctor looking at her in any particular way and believed Regina when she said she was visiting them because she was invested in Henry’s health. Her son was endearing, after all. Surely there was no other motive for Regina to continue her involvement in the case. From what Emma had seen, the brunette was professional and an excellent doctor, and certainly not someone who might jeopardise her career over inappropriate patient-doctor relations. Although Emma wasn’t actually Regina’s patient, the blonde mused. Not that that was relevant, of course. As she had said to Henry, it wasn’t like that with Regina.

Ok, Emma couldn’t deny that the doctor was attractive. Beautiful, even. Those wide brown eyes and that dark silky hair. Her slender body and those luscious lips. Even her collarbones, which delicately protruded from the top of her scrubs were stunning. But that wasn’t the point. Yes, Regina was gorgeous but Emma didn’t think of her in that way. She hadn’t thought of anyone in that way since Lily, in fact. Maybe one day she would be ready to move on but at the moment it was all about her and Henry. Even before he got sick Emma wasn’t thinking about dating, let alone now. So what if Henry’s doctor was exactly her type? And so what if the feel of Regina’s arms around her the day before had made her heart beat faster? That wasn’t on the cards for Emma right now, regardless of the woman who had just burst into her life.

By the time Emma had finished berating herself for the feelings she had been suppressing for days, she found herself back at the hospital entrance. Not ready just yet to return to the sterile environment inside, she continued her walking, this time forcing herself to think about her son.

Henry was going to get through this, she told herself. Henry had to get through this. They would find a donor and he would have the bone marrow transplant and he would get better. Within a few months this would all be behind them and he’d be back at school, playing with his friends and bubbling with life just like he used to. He was just a kid, after all. Of course he was going to get better. Henry was strong. He was a fighter. He was -

“Emma!”

She looked up at the call and saw her foster parents running towards her. She had just appeared around the side of the hospital and Mary had spotted her at once, dragging her husband behind her.
as they sprinted towards their daughter. Two sets of arms wrapped around her simultaneously as the pair barrelled into her, hugging her tightly. She hugged them back, face buried in her mother’s hair.

“Hi Mum, Dad,” she said as they pulled apart. “Thanks for coming.”

“Of course,” David said at once. “How’s Henry?”

“He was sleeping when I left,” Emma said. “Come on, let’s go and see him.”

Emma filled her parents in on the details of their grandson’s illness as the three of them headed up to the private room. Mary began wiping her eyes as soon as Emma started talking about surgery and David’s face was white. Their family consisted simply of Emma and Henry, having been unable to conceive themselves. Neither could bear the thought of what might happen to their only grandson.

Henry was awake when they reached the room, chatting happily to Regina who was spreading peanut butter on some toast for him on the breakfast tray which had appeared during Emma’s absence.

“Gran! Grandad!” Henry exclaimed, grinning happily.

“Hello young Henry,” David said, approaching the bed with a cautious Mary by his side. Neither had known quite what to expect and Henry’s perkiness had thrown them off. “How are you feeling?”

“Gina said I could have two slices of toast with peanut butter,” he announced, turning to smile at the doctor.

“Are you Henry’s doctor?” Mary asked, noting the white lab coat slung over the back of the chair but also that the woman wasn’t wearing scrubs.

“Not exactly,” Regina said getting to her feet and handing Henry his breakfast before shaking both grandparents’ hands. “I treated Henry when he first came into A and E and I’ve been keeping an eye on him since he’s been admitted. I was just sitting with him whilst Emma got some fresh air but I’ll be heading off now. I’ve just finished a night shift.”

If Mary and David were confused by this connection, they didn’t show it and bid farewell to the doctor as she gathered her bag and coat to leave.

“Regina, wait,” Emma said just as the doctor reached the door. Emma once again led the way out into the corridor, leaving Henry with his grandparents. She waited until the door closed before continuing. “I just wanted to say thank you for sitting with Henry. I needed to get out of there and hadn’t realised how much until this morning.”

“Of course,” Regina said. “You need to look after yourself too, Emma. Please, call me if you need anything.”

“Thanks, but you’ve done more than enough,” Emma said. “Henry’s not even your patient.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t care,” Regina pointed out.

Emma smiled. “I appreciate that.”

Regina nodded and readjusted her bag over her shoulder. “Well, I’d better go.”
“Yeah, ok. Thanks again. And enjoy your time off.”

“Thank you,” Regina said. “And I mean it, Emma. If you need anything at all, please know that I’m here for you and Henry.”

Emma nodded her understanding. With a final smile, Regina turned and headed off down the corridor. Emma watched her go for a moment before she returned to the room where her family was waiting, curious looks on all three faces.

“What?” she asked with a huff of annoyance.

Regina hadn’t slept so well in years, she decided as she awoke later that evening. Wrapping a dressing gown around herself, she padded through to the kitchen of her penthouse and set about making a salad for dinner. Or breakfast. To be honest her internal clock was so confused by her night shift lifestyle that she didn’t really care. All she knew was that she was hungry and when she took the first forkful as she sat down in front of the television, her body thanked her gratefully.

The television bored her but she forced herself to watch for a little while, needing to shut off her brain completely for a spell of time. Part of her training as a paediatrician had been in how not to get too attached to patients. Disassociation was key. And usually Regina was good at it. That night, however, Henry Swan kept invading her mind. Eventually she turned off the television and picked up her iPad, beginning to read about X-Linked Lymphoproliferative Disease. She was impressed Zelena had caught it. Proud even. The disease was not only rare but also incredibly hard to detect amongst a host of other symptoms related to glandular fever. Her reading, however, did not fill Regina with hope. Even if they did find a suitable donor for Henry, the small boy had a hellish road ahead of him and his chances of a complete recovery were, as Zelena had said, only thirty per cent. But there was a chance. That was what they had to cling to. And thanks to Zelena’s early diagnosis, Henry’s odds were definitely higher than most cases.

Regina reached for her phone when she’d finished the fifth article on XLP she could find, firing off a quick text to Zelena to ask how Henry was. She knew her friend would have clocked off work an hour or so before and hopefully the boy had indeed been discharged. Before the reply came through, however, Regina’s exhaustion caught up with her once more and she fell asleep again, curled up in the armchair, iPad resting on her chest.

Emma loved her foster parents. They had taken her in when she was nine and had given her the first stable home of her life. It took some time but eventually she had even begun to call them Mum and Dad. After all, no one else in her life had ever deserved those titles. The Blanchards had never formally adopted Emma but the paperwork was negligible to all three of them. They were a family and that was all that mattered.

But it was when the two of them came to stay that Emma remembered how small her apartment really was. She had been looking forward to getting home so much and was immensely relieved when Doctor West had confirmed that Henry could be discharged. But as soon as the four of them had bundled through the door, she had needed her own space.

Mary had fussed over Henry and given him a bubble bath before burying him beneath a mountain of blankets on the sofa whilst David set about making Henry’s favourite meal, salmon fillet and mashed potato. Emma stood watching, awkwardly displaced by her own parents around her own son. She was happy to have Henry home, of course, but deep down she wanted it to be just the two of them. And then a wave of guilt hit her as she remembered that both Mary and David had undergone blood tests that afternoon to determine whether they could donate their bone marrow to
Henry. Emma had been told about the painful procedure and knew her parents would go through hell if they were found to be a match. And they would gladly do it for Henry, or even herself, making Emma feel even worse about the fact that she resented their presence in the house.

She was relieved, therefore, when Henry fell asleep and she was given an excuse to escape the busy living room. She carried her son into his bedroom and placed him gently on the bed. She hummed the tune of one of his old lullabies to him, her hand rubbing soothingly over his chest. He was still hot, she noted as she touched his forehead, but the fact that he was eating meant his strength was returning.

Emma wasn’t sure exactly what Doctor West had said to Henry the day before when she had been with Regina but the boy’s appetite had definitely improved. She suspected the doctor had explained in child’s terms the importance of Henry staying as healthy as possible before the transplant. Emma still hadn’t had a chance to speak to her son properly about what was, hopefully, going to happen. She didn’t know how much he understood nor did she want to get his hopes up if a transplant was unavailable.

By the time Emma returned to the living room half an hour later, Mary and David had expanded the sofa into a bed and were laying a clean sheet on top. Well, at least she didn’t have to host them, Emma mused as she watched her parents making themselves at home.

“You look knackered, darling,” Mary said, approaching her daughter with a concerned look in her eyes.

“It’s been a long week,” Emma shrugged. “I just need to get a good night’s sleep in a proper bed and I’ll be fine.”

“Go ahead,” David said. “Your mum and I can check on Henry for you too. Is there anything we need to know?”

“He can have a paracetamol any time after midnight if he wakes up but aside from that, no,” Emma said. She headed towards her own bedroom but paused in the doorway and turned back. “Thank you for coming up to be with us. We really appreciate it.”

Mary smiled. “Of course,” she said. “Anything for our favourite daughter.”

Emma rolled her eyes at the old family joke but couldn’t help the twitch in her lips. Simultaneously, David and Mary blew kisses towards the blonde and, instinctively, Emma caught them, the tradition lifting her spirits slightly before she headed into her bedroom and closed the door.

Much as Regina had been looking forward to her time off, by the next afternoon she was bored. She had caught up on her sleep already, reorganised her wardrobe and done a much needed food shop. And now … now she was itching to get back to work.

Regina loved her job. She had wanted to be a doctor for as long as she could remember. Her parents had been supportive enough, although her father was a little disappointed she hadn’t followed him down the political pathway. Her mother, however, seemed proud of her accomplishments. Becoming a fully qualified paediatric doctor by the age of twenty-nine had been a tough slog but she had worked hard and was loving her time at the London hospital.

Of course, seeing children and their families suffering, especially in A and E where it was so often unclear what was wrong was difficult but Regina found solace in the fact that she was working to
make them better. With her best friend working in the paediatric wing, she was often able to keep an eye on patients who were admitted too. And then there were those special patients for whom a visit upstairs was sometimes in order.

She had been relieved when Zelena had told her the previous day how Henry Swan had been discharged, sent home with his mother and grandparents where at least he would be surrounded by toys and his familiar possessions. Hospital wasn’t fun for any child, especially one looking at spending a lot of time there. She hadn’t heard anything from Zelena since that text but she suspected the grandparents’ blood test results were back. No news was good news, right?

Her fingers reached for her phone and she opened her messages. Should she contact Zelena? She was surprised her friend hadn’t questioned Regina involvement in the case thus far. In fact, she was just waiting for the moment when the redhead called her out on it. After all, Zelena knew Regina better than anyone. She then wondered about messaging Emma but immediately realised that whilst the blonde had Regina’s business card, she herself had no way of contacting the young mother. And, of course, that would be highly unprofessional.

Shaking her head in annoyance, Regina began to write a new text.

_Hey, it was great to meet you on NYE. Sorry for the delay - I was on nights at the hospital. Would you like to meet for drinks this weekend? Regina x_

She hesitated for a moment before she sent the message. Eventually, her finger tapped the button. Whatever she felt for Emma Swan, Regina knew she couldn’t act on it. Instead, she needed a distraction and the pretty blonde from that New Year’s Eve party would do perfectly.

Staring out of her window, watching the trains coming and going through Clapham Junction station, Emma wiped her tears away. But more fell in their place. Her parents said nothing, sitting side by side on the couch, helpless. Henry was asleep. He didn’t know yet.

Doing the only thing she could think of, Emma pulled out her phone and began to type.

_Hey, it’s Emma Swan. Neither of my foster parents were a match for him. I don’t know what to tell him. I don’t know what to do. Can you help me?”_
The cafe was quiet. That was one of the reasons Emma had picked it. She had wanted to meet somewhere they could talk without distractions. She had also never been there and knew no one who worked in the little restaurant. Whilst the diner owned by Ruby’s grandmother was always her staple place to go for anything and everything, she didn’t want word getting back to her best friend. Not yet. And apparently gossiping ran in the family.

She was early. Nervous. The cup of coffee sat before her, the halfhearted attempt at latte-art spreading slowly until the leaf shape was no longer distinguishable. She jabbed a spoon through the foam, stirring rigorously and sloshing some of the liquid onto the table. Muttering a swear word under her breath, she was too busy mopping up the mess to notice the arrival of the person she had been waiting for.

“Hi.”

Emma looked up and blushed, embarrassed at having been caught smearing coffee across what looked like a small antique table.

“Hi,” she repeated, getting to her feet and holding out her hand not clutching the napkins. “Thanks for coming. Do you want a coffee?”

“I’ll get it,” Regina reassured her, gesturing for the blonde to sit back down. “Do you want anything else? A replacement perhaps?”

Emma couldn’t help but smile and shook her head, resuming her seat and her task of cleaning up. Minutes later, Regina returned with her own latte and two bear claws on a plate. Emma hadn’t even noticed that the cafe served them. They weren’t very easy to come by in England.

“You said you liked them,” the doctor said simply as she pushed one of the plates towards Emma.

Although she didn’t feel much like eating, Emma picked one up and took a bite, nodding her thanks and trying to remember when she’d mentioned her penchant for the American snack to her son’s former doctor. Her time in the hospital was such a blur she struggled to remember any real details aside from information pertaining to Henry’s illness.

“How’s Henry doing?” Regina asked, casting around for a question which would lead them easily into the topic she guessed Emma wanted to discuss.

“Oh, I guess,” Emma said. “He’s eating more now. Mum and Dad are with him watching Disney films.”
“I bet they’re enjoying spending time with him.”

“Whilst they still can?” Emma snapped.

Regina bit her lip. “No, Emma. That’s not what I meant. I just … it sounded like they don’t get to see much of the two of you, right?”

Emma sighed and nodded. She knew Regina hadn’t meant anything by the comment. “Yeah, they don’t come up too often. We make it down to Bristol a couple of times a year but I’m really bad at getting organised. It’s good they’re spending time with him.”

There was an awkward silence, both women thinking of the unspoken possibility. Would this be one of the last times Henry’s grandparents would see him?

“So, why did you want to meet?” Regina asked, needing to force the negative thoughts from her mind.

“My parents weren’t a match for Henry,” Emma began. Regina felt it unnecessary to say that she knew this piece of information already both from the blonde and Zelena. “So he has to go on the transplant list unless we can find another person to test.”

“Go on,” Regina nodded.

Emma looked a little awkward, a little embarrassed. The suspicion in the back of Regina’s mind when Emma has asked her to meet was growing.

“Well, there’s one person who would be the obvious choice,” Emma said. “But he’s not exactly going to be easy to find.”

“Henry’s father?” Regina asked, surprised. She wasn’t sure why but she had expected Emma to ask she herself if she’d be willing to donate. Regina knew she couldn’t go around donating bone marrow or blood to every patient of hers who needed it but she had to admit the thought had crossed her mind. And then left it as she remembered that she was the wrong blood group. In fact, she was relieved Emma hadn’t asked her; it would have been agonising for the blonde to be let down once again by biology.

“Yeah,” Emma continued. “I think he’s Henry’s best chance.”

“Do you know where he lives?”

“I know three things about Neal,” Emma said. “His first name, the fact that seven years ago he was a regular in this grungy little bar in Bristol, and the fact that he doesn’t have the good manners to wait until a girl wakes up before leaving the next morning.”

Regina wrinkled her nose. Men had no class. She also tried to force the wave of jealousy down when she thought about Emma having sex with this mysterious Neal. Now was not the time for that particular trait of hers to rear its head.

“Right,” Regina said slowly. “Well, it’s not a lot to go on, is it?”

Emma shook her head and took a sip of her half-empty coffee cup followed by a bite of bear claw. Regina watched with satisfaction as the pale woman consumed some food and drink, even if it wasn’t the healthiest. It was clear the blonde hadn’t been taking good care of herself since Henry got ill. Understandably, yet unhelpfully.
“So, what’s your plan?”

Emma shrugged. “I’m going to find him. Somehow, I guess. I was planning to go to the bar where I met him. Seems as good a place as any to start and hopefully he’ll either still be a deadbeat drinking there or someone else will know where to find him.”

“I suppose so,” Regina replied. “But, I’m a little confused. I thought you said you needed my help.”

Emma bit her lip, nervous suddenly. The request, now they were here seemed not only ridiculous to ask a perfect stranger but also downright rude. There was no way Regina would consent to what Emma had in mind.

“Um, I just wanted your opinion, I guess. On the plan,” Emma finished lamely.

“The plan,” Regina repeated. “You mean you texted me and arranged to meet to ask me if I thought it was a good idea for you to go to a bar in Bristol to try and track down a man you haven’t seen in seven years?”

Emma nodded but said nothing.

Regina sighed and put down her now empty coffee cup. “Emma, why did you really ask me here?” she said gently, knowing there was something more.

The white porcelain of the coffee mug obscured Emma’s lips as the request finally tumbled from them, cheeks pinked with embarrassment at the fact that she’d even confessed to what she had hoped would happen.

“Excuse me?” Regina asked, gently lowering the coffee cup with the crook of her finger and exposing Emma’s mouth once more.

“Come with me?”

Regina’s eyes widened. Had Emma just invited her on a road trip? A trip intended to find a man she had slept with once seven years ago who could now be her son’s best hope at receiving a bone marrow transplant and surviving a rare disease? Was that what had just happened?

“Come with you?” Regina said slowly. “To Bristol?”

“Stupid idea,” Emma said, the coffee mug clattering back onto the saucer. “Forget I even asked. I’ll just head off this afternoon and we can forget all about this incredibly embarrassing conversation, ok?”

“But if you want to go with someone why don’t you ask Ruby?” Regina frowned. From what she had gleaned during the short time she had met Emma’s fiery-haired friend, the two of them were close.

“She has to work,” Emma shrugged. “And I’m not exactly about to ask my parents to track down a one night stand with me, am I?”

“But you’re son’s doctor is an acceptable back-up?”

Emma blushed even more. “Well, you’re technically not his doctor,” she reasoned.

Regina couldn’t help but smile at that. Technically, Emma was right.

“But how on earth would I be of any help?” Regina asked. “I’ve only been to Bristol once and I
highly doubt I frequented the bar in which you met Neal.”

Emma shrugged again. “I dunno,” she admitted. “I just didn’t want to do it on my own.”

Regina regarded the woman before her. Emma’s eyes were dulled, the green orbs lifeless and tired-looking. Her skin too bore the mark of lack of sleep and poor food. She was slumped in her chair, defeated, dejected, and looking utterly helpless. Regina’s heart broke a little as she saw the woman, so clearly in pain, desperate to do anything she possibly could to help her son. A son who, despite Regina’s best attempts not to think about, was going to die without a transplant. She was sure Emma knew that fact too and couldn’t imagine the weight of such knowledge. She wondered if Henry knew, or at least sensed, how ill he really was.

“Ok,” Regina said. “When do we leave?”

“What?” Emma asked, eyes snapping up to meet Regina’s. “You’ll come?”

“I’m still not sure how much help I will be but yes, I’ll come with you.”

Emma grinned for the first time in days. She too didn’t know how Regina might assist her in her crazy quest but at least she’d have someone with her. At least the two of them would be doing something practical to try and help Henry. Emma wasn’t sure how practical looking for a man called Neal in a city of over 400,000 people was but she was willing to try.

“I was going to leave this afternoon,” Emma said. “Is that ok? It’s Saturday and I figured it would be the best night to look for Neal in the bar.”

Regina nodded. “Sure. I’ll head home and pack an overnight bag and then we can get going. Shall I meet you back here at two? You live nearby, right?”

“Eversleigh Road,” Emma nodded.

“Wow,” Regina said. “That’s gotta be loud.”

Emma laughed. It was true, the noise from one of the UK’s busiest train stations was a constant companion to her life. “You get used to it,” Emma shrugged. “Where do you live?”

“Grant Road,” Regina replied.

“Hang on, that’s even closer to the station than my flat!” Emma exclaimed. “Surely your place is noisier.”

“Twentieth floor, soundproof glass,” Regina grinned. “The noise only reaches me if I open the windows.”

“ Twentieth floor, huh,” Emma said, an appraising eye roving over the brunette. She knew doctors earned a decent salary but even that wouldn’t explain how Regina managed to afford such an expensive sounding place. She knew the gated community in which she suspected the doctor lived; it was fancy.

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “Great views. You’ll have to come by some time and check them out.”

She didn’t know what made her say it and as soon as the words left her mouth she regretted them. Doctors shouldn’t invite the mothers of their patients to their apartments. But, she mused, mothers of patients shouldn’t invite doctors on road trips either.
“When we get back,” Emma said without missing a beat. “But we should probably leave soon if we want to get to the city before dark.”

Emma didn’t mention to her parents who was accompanying her on the expedition to Bristol. All she said was that she was going to try and find Henry’s father and asked if they would stay in London for a few days until she returned. She, in turn, would stay at their house in Bristol and water the plants and feed the cats. Mary and David agreed, of course. Any excuse to spend more time with their grandson. Henry cried when Emma told him she was leaving. He didn’t cry much now he was older but a combination of being sick and the fact that Emma was also in tears when she hugged him and whispered that she loved him had prompted the breakdown. And then the door was shut behind her and, with a rucksack slung over her shoulder, she set off down the hallway.

When she got to the cafe where they had met that morning, Regina was nowhere to be seen. Parking up, Emma began scrolling through her iPhone, trying to find a road trip worthy playlist. She had little to choose from and was so busy searching Spotify for a solution to the problem that she didn’t notice the brunette approach until a set of knuckles rapped on the window.

“Shit!” Emma exclaimed, the phone tumbling out of her hands and sliding down between the seat and the gear console.

With an apologetic look, Regina rounded the car and opened the passenger door, tossing her bag into the back seat and handing Emma a coffee just as she retrieved her slightly dusty phone.

“Sorry,” she offered as she slid into her seat, another coffee clutched in her hands.

“S’okay,” Emma said, wiping the screen and nodding her thanks to the coffee. “Are you ready?”

“Sure,” Regina nodded.

Emma selected a playlist, hit shuffle, and plugged the aux cord into the stereo system Ruby had installed for her several years previous. She then pulled out into the steady stream of traffic and their road trip began.

It wasn’t until Emma swung the car onto the M4 half an hour later, that either woman said a word. The lack of conversation hadn’t exactly been awkward but as soon as their journey had started, both Emma and Regina had suddenly realised how unorthodox and bizarre their situation is.

“So, you grew up in Bristol?” Regina asked just as Emma merged onto the motorway, the old yellow car standing out blindingly against the boring blues, blacks and silvers.

“Yeah,” Emma nodded. “Well, that’s where I spent most of my childhood. My foster parents moved there when I was ten and before that I bounced around the system so much I never really got to know any other city or town well enough to call it home.”

“Sounds like a rough start in life,” Regina said.

Emma shrugged. It hadn’t been the best, no. But she had gotten lucky when she met Mary and David and she didn’t dwell on what had come before. She was luckier than many, she knew that.

“I’m a Londoner, born and bred,” Regina continued when Emma didn’t answer nor ask another question.

“A real city girl then,” Emma said.
“Indeed,” Regina nodded. “Although I do like to get out, every now and then.” She watched the green fields whizzing by the window as she spoke. It had been a long time since she had left the capital. Too long, perhaps. Even on a dull January day, the countryside looked inviting to her and she wondered whether their expedition would take them outside of the city at all.

“Do your parents still live in the city?” Emma asked, pulling Regina back to the present.

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “Although they’re both retired now.”

“What did they do?” Emma asked.

“My mother was in corporate law and my father was in politics,” Regina said vaguely.

Emma nodded and then gasped. “Hang on. Mills? As in Herbert Mills?”

Regina grimaced. “Perhaps.”

“Jesus, Regina! Your dad is one of the most celebrated politicians this country has ever had,” Emma said, clearly impressed.

The blonde liked to keep up to date on the news and current events of the day and as a teenager Herbert Mills had been a regular fixture in the headlines. For all the right reasons, unlike the politicians which graced the papers today. He had been a firm Labour Member of Parliament, fought passionately for the state school system and the NHS alongside a whole host of social issues Emma also supported. She couldn’t quite believe she was now sat beside such an admirable man’s daughter. And a beautiful daughter at that, her brain supplied, unhelpfully.

“Yeah, he’s an amazing man,” Regina nodded, cheeks pinked a little.

“And you didn’t want to get into politics yourself?” Emma asked.

Regina shook her head. “I’m not great at being in the public eye, to be honest,” she said. “And I loved science. I just wanted to help people in a hands-on way. I saw how hard my dad worked to get those bills into Parliament and although he did good, he was burnt out by the time he was fifty. I love him for what he did, but it wasn’t a career I wanted for myself.”

“I get that,” Emma nodded. “Both my parents are teachers and I don’t have the patience for any children other than Henry.”

Regina laughed. She could imagine that, she realised. She didn’t know much about the blonde but the fact that she would struggle to keep her cool in a room of thirty young children didn’t surprise her at all.

“What do you do?” Regina asked, realising she didn’t even know that about her road trip companion.

“I’m in publishing,” Emma said. “An editor.”

“Wow,” Regina said. “Impressive at such a young age.”

“How do you know how old I am?” Emma asked, glancing sideways at the brunette and frowning.

“It was on Henry’s medical records,” Regina defended. “And yours once we tested your blood.”

“Oh, right.”
Emma wasn’t sure what she had thought Regina was going to say. Facebook-stalking might have been something she did in her own free time but of course a paediatrician had better things to do than to scour the internet for mothers of her patients. Plus, as far as Emma could tell, Regina didn’t even have a Facebook page. At least, she hadn’t found one.

“How old are you?” Emma asked to cover up any embarrassment.

“Thirty,” Regina said.

“No kids?” Emma asked.

“Haven’t had the time,” Regina said. “Dating is hard when your either studying or working a crazy schedule. Relationships never last long when you’re in medicine, it seems.”

Emma nodded her understanding. She wasn’t great at dating either. Before Lily she hadn’t seen anyone seriously since she was in high school and that could hardly be considered a serious relationship either. She briefly wondered what had ever happened to August.

“Shit,” Regina suddenly exclaimed.

“What?” Emma asked, alarmed as she looked over at Regina who was rummaging through her bag, clearly looking for something.

“I, um, I actually have a date tonight. I completely forgot,” Regina said as she grabbed her phone. “I’ll just quickly ring her and tell her I had to go out of town.”

Emma was about to protest and insist she could drive Regina back to London when she realised what the brunette had said. Her. Whoever Regina was about to call was a woman. Emma’s grip on the steering wheel tightened and she forced herself to look at the road just as Regina placed the phone to her ear.

The conversation was brief and Emma could only here one side of it. Regina apologised for the short notice and promised to call when she was back in town. But the information she gave was vague and Emma knew if she had been on the other end of the phone, she’d have been rather disgruntled. Not just because she would have been stood up by Regina. When the phone was back in Regina’s bag, Emma chanced a glance at her companion.

“How’d she take it?” Emma asked, hoping the use of the pronoun was subtle.

“Ok,” Regina shrugged. “It would have been our first date so it’s no big deal. I just feel bad because I was the one who asked her out. Cancelling less than twenty-four hours later seems a bit of a dick move.”

“No pun intended,” Emma said before she could stop herself.

There was silence and then Regina burst out laughing. Emma let out the breath she had been holding and laughed too, relief washing over her.

“Yeah, true,” Regina nodded. “No dicks to be seen here.”

Emma blushed a little at hearing the doctor not only say the word again but the unabashed nature at which she had just admitted her sexual orientation to the blonde. Emma had never labeled herself but she had been in relationships with both men and women, although admittedly over the past few years it was mostly women to whom she had been attracted. And much as she had tried to deny it, she knew that attraction extended to Regina.
“So, um, when we get to Bristol I thought we’d drop our stuff off at my parents’ house and then we can go and ask at the bar where we met. See if anyone knows or remembers Neal.”

“Ok,” Regina nodded. “Are your parents ok with me staying at their house?”

“Well, they don’t exactly know you’re with me,” Emma admitted. “I may have left out that detail.”

Perfectly plucked eyebrows rose. “Any particular reason?” Regina asked.

Emma shrugged. “Did you tell Doctor West your weekend plans?”

“Touché,” Regina chuckled. “I suppose this is a little unusual as far as doctor-patient-patient’s mother relationships go.”

“Sorry if I put you in an awkward situation,” Emma offered. “I just … didn’t want to do this alone.”

Regina reached across the car and squeezed Emma’s leg just above her knee. Emma jumped at the touch and briefly closed her eyes, forcing them open only because she needed to see the road in order not to crash the car.

“We’ll find him,” Regina said to her. “And if we don’t, we’ll find Henry a match another way. There are donors who register with us all the time so maybe one of them will be suitable.”

Emma nodded but said nothing. She had read up on bone marrow transplants after Henry’s diagnosis. The donor went through almost as much hell as the patient and Emma was awed and impressed that people put themselves through such an ordeal for, in some cases, a perfect stranger.

She would have done it for Henry herself in a heartbeat but of course she couldn’t. And she knew too that Mary and David were devastated at their results. It might have been a long shot because they weren’t blood relatives but both Blanchards had desperately wanted to help their grandson.

“You know,” Regina began after a minute of silence. “When you asked to meet with me, I thought you were going to ask if I would donate to Henry.”

“No,” Emma said at once. “I could never do that to you. You’re his doctor, that would be -.”

“I’m not a match,” Regina interrupted. “I’m type AB. It wouldn’t have worked.”

“Oh,” Emma said quietly, a flicker of hope she hadn’t even realised had been burning inside her eclipsed at once. “Right.”

There was another pause and then: “I would have done it,” Regina said. “If I had been a match and you had asked me, I would have donated.”

“Could you even do that?” Emma asked. “I mean, surely the NHS can’t allow its doctors to go around saving lives with their own body parts.”

Regina shrugged. “I would have argued my case.”

Emma bit her lip, the sentiment not lost on her that Regina would have fought with her employer to be allowed to save Henry. And yet … she wasn’t a match. Although Doctor West hadn’t explicitly given them a time period, Emma knew they were working against the clock. Every person who tested negative was yet another step closer towards Henry becoming a very sick little boy.

“We’ll find him a donor, Emma,” Regina repeated again.
“I hope so,” Emma whispered. “I can’t live without Henry, Regina. I can’t.”

“Then let’s make sure you don’t have to,” Regina said, pointing to the sign looming ahead of them which indicated they were about to reach Bristol. “Let’s go and find Henry’s father.”
A/N: Ok, I got inspired. And by inspired, I mean I just love writing these women!

The familiar smell of her childhood home greeted Emma as she pushed open the door to the end-terrace Victorian house and stepped back to let Regina inside first. The cats were sat at the base of the stairs, appraising the intruders into their newly conquered territory even though Mary and David had only left the day before and their neighbour had been feeding them.

“Hey kittens,” Emma said, bending down to scratch each of their heads.

They ducked out of the way and slunk off, tails high, making it very clear they did not appreciate having been abandoned by their rightful owner for over half a year. The cats had been a Christmas present for Emma one year but she had decided it would be unfair on them to move them into her small apartment in London with no outside space so they had remained in Bristol.

“What a welcome,” Emma sighed, turning and smiling at Regina weakly. “That was Tiger and Panther. No prizes for guessing which one the ginger is and which is the black one,” she added. “Oh and never let children name pets.”

“Your doing?” Regina asked, grinning at the childish, obvious names.

“I was twelve,” Emma nodded. “And probably should have known better. Come on, I’ll show you the guest room.”

Although Emma had moved to London five years before, the bedroom where she had raised Henry for the first year of his life was practically unchanged. She smiled at the memory as she entered the room, tossing her rucksack onto the bed and returning to the corridor where Regina was waiting. The house wasn’t big but there was a decent sized guest bedroom at the back and that was where Emma led the brunette. Luckily the door had been closed as Panther was rather fond of the bed but the clean white sheets were crisp and cat-hair free when they walked in.

“Bathroom is just to the left,” Emma said. “There are fresh towels in the cupboard there.”

“Thanks, this is great,” Regina said. “I’ll just get changed and then we can head out.”

Emma glanced at her phone. It was only just after six in the evening. “We have time,” she shrugged. “I’ll chuck on a pan of pasta or something before we go. No one really heads to bars much before nine anyway.”

“Do you have any vegetables to throw into that pasta dish?” Regina asked.

Emma grinned. “Worried about my unhealthy diet of coffee and bear claws?”

“Perhaps,” Regina said. “You need to take care of yourself, remember?”

“I’ll go and rummage around in the fridge then,” Emma said, as she left the room.
It was not exactly surprising that the Blanchard’s fridge was sparse. After all, they had intended to come to London for a few days and hadn’t been shopping. But there was an unopened jar of tomato sauce in the cupboard and she found a courgette and pepper in the back of the vegetable drawer. Chopping both up, she added them to the sauce as the pasta bubbled away before grating some cheese. She was about to call up the stairs for Regina to tell her dinner was ready when she heard the clicking of heels on the stairs.

“Hey, do you want parmesan?” Emma asked without turning around as Regina entered.

“Yes please,” the brunette said, coming up to peer over the blonde’s shoulder. “Smells good.”

“Thanks,” Emma said, glancing at the woman beside her and doing a double-take. “Wow. Um, you changed.”

Emma stepped slightly away from the brunette and allowed her eyes to take in the doctor. She supposed she had never seen Regina outside of either doctor scrubs or her casual clothes between shifts. Well, as casual as Regina Mills ever got. But now the brunette was dressed in a sheer dark red blouse, skin tight black jeans and her make-up had been reapplied to deliver a smokey, sexy look.

“Is this ok?” Regina asked, noting that Emma was staring at her. “You didn’t tell me what sort of a bar it was but I figured I wouldn’t need a dress.”

“Um, no. It’s great,” Emma said, forcing her eyes back to meet Regina’s. Which didn’t help because now ringed with perfectly applied black eyeliner and mascara with grey shadow blended behind it, Regina’s brown orbs were more beautiful than Emma had ever seen. “Really, you look great.”

“Thanks,” Regina said, reaching for a bowl of pasta and turning towards the small table upon which Emma had laid cutlery and a jug of water.

“Do you want wine?” Emma asked.

“Should we have wine?” Regina countered. “I thought it might be a good idea to keep a clear head for whatever happens tonight.”

“Probably,” Emma said, placing her plate down and, instead of sitting, walking over to a cupboard by the door. “But I think I need a little Dutch courage, to be honest.”

She pulled out a random bottle of red wine, grabbed a corkscrew from the counter, and opened the drink with a flourish. Seconds later, the rich liquid was pouring into two glasses, one for Regina and one for Emma.

“Cheers,” Regina said as Emma sat down.

Their glasses clinked softly together and Emma forced a smile. At least someone was here with her, she mused. Sitting in her childhood home just waiting to go to a bar she had barely thought about in seven years alone didn’t sound like a pleasant way to spend a Saturday night. Although, Emma realised, she wasn’t sure what she and Regina were about to do would be much better. She’d have someone with her, however, as a distraction.

It was after nine when the two women left the house and climbed into the Uber they had called to take them to the bar. Emma had changed too and was wearing a pair of dark blue jeans and a white top. Her red leather jacket completed the look, which, she realised, perfectly matched Regina’s
blouse.

Emma had phoned Henry after dinner to check in on him and her parents. All was fine, it seemed. Well, as fine as it could be with a child suffering from glandular fever and XLP. He was already bathed and in his pyjamas when Emma spoke to him and she had even ad-libbed a bedtime story for him before wishing him goodnight and hanging up with tears in her eyes.

The drive towards the bar was quiet. There wasn’t much that needed to be said, really. Either Neal would be there, or he wouldn’t be. Emma stared out of the window as the familiar streets flashed past the windows. She had loved living in Bristol and missed the smaller city feel now she was accustomed to the hustle and bustle of London. In fact, if it hadn’t been under such circumstances, she may even have been happy to be heading on a night out. Bristol had been a wonderful place to grow up, she realised.

Regina flitted between watching the unknown streets and glancing at Emma. She wanted to say something reassuring to the young woman but she didn’t even know where to begin. In settings outside of the hospital, Regina felt exposed. She didn’t know exactly what to make of Emma, nor the proposition for the two of them to track down Henry’s birth father together. They were no longer doctor and patient. In fact, they had never been doctor and patient. But whatever was forming between them was messy, Regina could tell. From her point of view, at least. She knew exactly what would have happened between them had they met under different circumstances. A bar, drunk, for example. That was, if she had read Emma’s body language correctly and the blonde really was into women.

She glanced across at the back of Emma’s head, eyes taking the opportunity to rake over the slender body without shame as the young mother stared out of the window. Yes, Regina decided. Had she and Emma met in a bar, they would definitely have slept together.

And yet, they didn’t. They had met in A and E when Emma had brought in her very sick child. Yes, the attraction remained. Yes, Regina was inexplicably drawn to Emma. Yes, Regina had caught Emma’s eyes lingering on her longer than was polite. But fate had intervened and decided the two women would meet not drunk and instead be thrust together on one of the most difficult days of Emma’s life. There was no way anything could happen between them, Regina told herself. This was about Henry and nothing more.

The car slowed and pulled to a stop as Regina peered through the rain streaked window at the building before them. It was, as Emma had said, grimy. The street itself seemed to have a number of upbeat bars and even a few clubs on it but the door outside which they had stopped was another story. A neon sign was hung over a doorway, its angle jaunty and half its letters dull. Regina squinted through the darkness and finally deciphered The Rabbit Hole.

How apt, she thought to herself as she climbed out of the car and joined Emma who was waiting for her, huddled against the rain. Together, they dashed into the bar.

It hadn’t changed, Emma realised as soon as she entered. Everything was exactly as she remembered from that night. Although, she mused, her memories of that night weren’t exactly detailed. She glanced at Regina.

“Um, it’s nice,” the doctor tried lamely.

“It’s a shit hole,” Emma laughed. “Come on, I’ll buy you a drink.”

The two of them picked their way through the crowd, which appeared to be made up of barely-of-age drinkers, and reached the bar. Emma leaned on it to get the bartender’s attention and Regina
grimaced as she watched Emma’s leather clad forearms smear their way through something sticky. Without thinking, she picked up some napkins and tried to clean up the mess.

“What - ? Oh, thanks,” Emma said, wrinkling her nose at the beer-covered cuffs where the brunette was now dabbing gently.

Regina was about to answer when they were interrupted by the bartender asking what they wanted. Emma ordered two small red wines and turned her attention back to Regina who was just finishing up her task.

“Thanks but you didn’t have to,” Emma said, shaking her arms to realign her newly cleaned jacket.

“It’s fine,” Regina said. “Just, don’t touch anything in here, ok? You don’t know what sort of diseases you’re going to contract.”

Emma laughed and agreed just as their wine glasses appeared in front of them. Paying for the overpriced drinks, both women turned to survey the room.

“So, um, what am I looking for?” Regina asked, taking a sip of her wine. Her lips pursed at the acidic taste but she didn’t say anything.

“Older than most of the children in here. Average height, average weight, brown hair, brown eyes. Answers to the name of Neal,” Emma said, also taking a drink. “Dear God that’s vile,” she remarked, placing her glass on the bar and pulling Regina’s from her hands. “Don’t drink it, I’m fairly sure that was vinegar.”

“Thank you,” Regina sighed. “I didn’t want to be rude but yes, that was pretty horrific.”

Emma laughed and then the two of them returned to scanning the bar, Regina still fairly unclear on what she was looking for. But it didn’t take long for Emma to turn dejectedly back to the bar, carefully avoiding the beer this time and gesturing to the bartender.

“Not here?” Regina asked.

“No,” Emma said.

“More wine?” the bartender asked, his jet black hair flopping over his eyes as he leered at the two women.

“I would hardly call that wine,” Regina said. “And no. Two gin and tonics. Please,” she added. Manners were important, even in places as disgusting as The Rabbit Hole.

“I don’t know what I was expecting,” Emma said quietly. “It’s been seven years. Even if he was a regular then, why on earth would he still be here? I mean, people move on, grow up, stop drinking away their lives, right? We were nineteen back then. Of course he isn’t still here with all the now-nineteen year olds.”

“Don’t give up just yet,” Regina said, passing one newly arrived drink to Emma and tossing a twenty pound note onto the bar. “Neal might have moved on but if he was a regular back then I bet there’s someone here who remembers him.”

“Like that guy?” Emma asked, pointing to the man at the end of the bar.

With a beanie hat perched on his head and a bomber jacket on despite the musty warmth of the bar, the man was the stereotypical drunk on a Saturday night. A little older than the rest of the crowd, a
little apart, nursing half a pint and looking around lazily as if to find someone with whom he could talk for the evening. Just as Regina turned to see who Emma was pointing at, he looked directly at them.

“Come on,” Regina said, picking up her drink and leading the way around to the drunk.

Blue eyes widened in surprise and a grubby hand reached up to pull the beanie from his head in a vain attempt at politeness. Judging by the state of his hair, however, Regina thought it would have been kinder towards them if he had kept the hat on.

“Good evening,” Regina said. “How are you doing?”

“All the better for seeing you, sweet heart,” the man growled, his voice raspy from years of smoking. “I’m Pete.”

“Hi Pete,” Regina said, forcing a smile. “I’m Regina and this is Emma. We’re looking for a man called Neal who sometimes drinks here and we’re wondering if you know him.”

“Don’t know any Neals,” Pete replied. “But I’m sure whoever he is I’m far more interesting and better looking.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Regina said. “But we actually really need to speak to Neal, just for a minute. Do you ever remember speaking to anyone by that name, say in the past seven years?”

“Seven years?” Pete frowned and then chuckled. “Sweetheart, if he hasn’t returned your calls by now, he ain’t gonna.”

“Ok, thanks for your time,” Emma said, reaching for Regina’s arm and tugging her away.

Pete’s shouts of protests as they left followed as they made their way back to the far end of the bar, dejected. Regina kept looking around but couldn’t see anyone who looked like they would have even been of age to drink seven years ago. She was starting to feel rather old.

“Well, we tried,” Emma said. “Thanks for that.”

The tone in Regina’s voice made her frown. “So that’s it? You’re just giving up?”

“What more do you want to do?” Emma asked. “If Pete doesn’t remember him I doubt anyone else would. They’re all about fifteen years old. That kid still has acne. There’s no way they were here back then.”

“So you dragged me all the way to Bristol to ask drunk Pete if he knew a guy called Neal and now, what? We go home?”

“Yeah,” Emma snapped. “We go home.”

Regina folded her arms and levelled Emma with a steely gaze. “No,” she replied. “I’m not giving up. We came here to find Henry’s best chance at a donor and I am not going back to London until we track down Neal.”

“Neal?”

Emma and Regina turned towards the voice and saw the bartender standing before them.

“Yeah, do you know him?” Emma asked, a flicker of hope burning suddenly deep inside her.
“I know a few Neals,” the man said, leaning on the edge of the bar. Regina made a face. “Which one are you after?”

“The Neal who was drinking in here seven years ago with brown hair, brown eyes and a smile which made him rather popular with idiotic blonde women,” Emma said.

The bartender barked out a laugh. “Oh yeah. I miss that guy. Place changed after he left.”

“Left?” Emma asked. “Where did he go?”

“Cardiff,” the bartender replied. “He got a killer job down there working for the university as a bouncer. I’m sure he has those idiotic blonde women you speak of chucking themselves at him every night at that union. Man, those girls are wild.”

“Cardiff,” Emma repeated. “Are you sure?”

“Sure I’m sure,” the bartender said. “Neal and I were tight before he left. Don’t blame him for ducking out though. I would have gotten out of here if I could. Place has gone to the dogs since the kids started turning up.” He glowered at his young patrons before turning back to Emma. “Why’d you want Neal anyway?”

“Long story,” Emma said. “Are you sure he’s still working at the university?”

“I visited him last month and he didn’t have any plans to quit,” the bartender said. “So unless his boss found out about him shagging girls under the steps up to the union I’d say it’s a safe bet he’s still there.”

“Classy,” Emma said, rolling her eyes. It appeared Neal hadn’t changed. “Um,” she blushed, “what’s his surname?”

The bartender laughed. “I’m guessing you were one of those blonde idiots from back in the day, right?” Emma said nothing. “Neal Cassidy,” he supplied after a pause. “He’s on Facebook if you want to hit him up. His profile picture at the moment is a group of lads at a rugby match.”

“Thanks for the info,” Emma said as another piece of the puzzle slotted into place.

“Sure,” the bartender nodded. “Catch you ladies later. Good luck on your search.”

He moved off down the bar and Emma turned to Regina.

“I guess we’re going to Cardiff then,” Regina said without missing a beat.

“Not tonight we’re not,” Emma said. “I can’t drive with the amount I’ve drunk and neither can you.”

“But it’s Saturday night,” Regina said.

“Yeah, and it’s Cardiff University so I can promise you there’ll be another party at the union tomorrow night. Those guys are wild,” Emma grinned.

“Oh really?” Regina asked. “Experience living it up with the Cardiff students, eh?”

Emma laughed. “It was where we went after college,” she explained. “Cheaper drinks, hotter guys. It’s an awesome party town.”

“Then I guess our work here is done,” Regina said, looking around the bar once more. “Want to get
out of this dive and go somewhere my shoes don’t stick to the floor and we’re not being stared at by fifty teenagers?”

“Yes please,” Emma nodded. “I think we deserve a little celebratory drink after all our detective work.”

“We haven’t found him yet,” Regina reminded Emma.

“No, but we’re on our way.”
A/N: I just started rewatching OUAT with my flatmate and my love for Lana redoubled. I didn’t even know that was possible. I may become hospitalised with Lana-itis… Anyway, I wrote more for you, dreaming of Lana as I type!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was still raining when they stepped out of The Rabbit Hole and into the street but the dismal January weather didn’t dampen Emma’s spirits. True, they hadn’t found Neal but they did now know where he was working and his full name. They were getting closer to finding Henry’s father and securing his help in saving their son.

“So, where do you want to go?” Regina asked as she wrapped her coat around her body. The sheer blouse wasn’t doing much to keep her warm and the wind bit at her cheeks and hands.

Emma glanced up and down the street and spotted a cocktail bar she knew served good drinks. Agreeing with her suggestion, Regina led the way across the road and soon the two of them were entering the much classier establishment, the blonde’s hand subconsciously in the small of the doctor’s back as she steered Regina inside. Emma sat in one of the few empty booths in the busy bar and Regina made her way through the crowd to order their drinks. Contenting herself with people watching, it was mere minutes before Regina had returned, two more gin and tonics in her hands. She slid into the booth next to Emma and they both took long drinks from their glasses.

“So,” Emma began, “you’re really ok with coming to Cardiff with me?”

“Do you want to go alone?” Regina asked, raising her voice to contend with the loud music thumping throughout the bar.

“No,” Emma admitted. “But I know you have to work next week.”

“Not until Tuesday,” Regina said. “As long as I’m back in the city by Monday evening then I’m happy to accompany you wherever our search takes us.”

Emma smiled gratefully. “Well, I’m hoping Cardiff will be the last stop, to be honest,” she said. “We’ll just have to hope that bartender’s information was correct.”

“He had no reason to lie,” Regina pointed out. “Although I suspect he knew you and Neal had a past.”

“Yeah,” Emma nodded. “I probably sounded like some pathetic girl who hadn’t gotten over her crush.”

“Seven years is a long time to be hung up on a one night stand,” Regina agreed. “Not that I have one night stands often,” she added, blushing slightly.

“Me neither,” Emma defended. “It only took one mistake for me to realise that sleeping around really wasn’t a good idea for me. Not that I regret Henry, of course. But it wasn’t exactly how I had planned to start a family.”
Regina understood. She too had a fantasy about starting her own family and getting knocked up by a random man didn’t fit the picture. In fact, men didn’t appear anywhere in the journey towards her making her own family.

“So, I guess your life changed pretty quickly once Henry came along,” Regina said.

Emma nodded and drank a little more of her drink. “Yeah, it wasn’t exactly what I had anticipated for my life but at least I’d finished school. Just. I never went to uni, though.”

“There’s always time to go back later in life,” Regina pointed out. “Mature students are very common these days. I did my medical degree alongside people in their forties.”

“Well, perhaps,” Emma shrugged. “But once Killian started the publishing house, I guess everything slotted into place. He knew how much I loved reading and offered me the job regardless of my lack of higher education. Pretty sure I read more books when I was pregnant and the first few months after Henry was born than most English Literature courses at university anyway. So when he set everything up, we moved to London when Henry was one and I’ve never looked back.”

“And why should you?” Regina asked. “You’ve clearly made a wonderful life for you and Henry. He’s lucky to have such a caring, thoughtful mother.”

“Who slept around so now we can’t even find his father to help save his life,” Emma added, a wave of guilt flowing over her once more. It had been a regular feeling ever since they discovered Henry was sick.

“Hey,” Regina said, reaching for Emma’s fidgeting fingers on the table. “We’re going to find Neal, ok? We’re going to get Henry what he needs.”

Emma said nothing, she just drank more of her gin and tonic one-handed, leaving her other entangled with Regina’s on the table. She tried to ignore the warm tingling she felt at the contact.

“Can we change the subject?” Emma asked. “Let’s talk about you. What was it like growing up with a famous father?”

“He’s not exactly famous,” Reinga said. “I mean, people know who he is but it’s not like the paparazzi were at our house. It was a bit weird seeing him on the TV when he first became a well-known MP but at home, he was just my dad. I don’t think much changed as he became a prominent figure of the party. Perhaps he was a little more stressed because of the pressure and media attention but he always tried to leave work at the door when he came home. My mother was the one who changed when her career took off.”

“How so?” Emma asked.

“She became a partner in the law firm when I was twelve. Her hours were crazy and I barely saw her during the week. Even if she was home she was buried under a mountain of paperwork in her office. It was only when my dad said something that she started to limit herself. It’s better now but she still works insanely long hours. Both me and Dad have tried to get her to retire but it’s not working so far.”

“She loves her work,” Emma said. “I get that. I can’t imagine retiring from the publishing world.”

“Yes but you’re twenty-five not sixty-three,” Regina pointed out. “She doesn’t need to work. She has a good pension, as does my dad. And sooner or later she’s going to burn herself out.”
“I guess,” Emma shrugged. “Kind of like you with those night shifts.”

Regina laughed. “Yeah, they’re not fun,” she admitted. “But people have medical emergencies at the most inconvenient times and someone has to be there to help them.”

Emma nodded her agreement at that statement. Before Henry got sick, she’d only been to A and E once in her life: after a drunken night out had ended in Ruby falling over and breaking her wrist. The two of them had stumbled inside close to four in the morning and the doctors had struggled, from what Emma remembered, to deal with the two drunk women. They’d passed out in the waiting room and when they came to in the late morning, had apologised profusely. Alcohol, Emma knew, made people do very stupid things. Neal Cassidy was just one such example of this.

“Do you like your work?” Emma asked.

“I love it,” Regina nodded. “But I fear if we continue this conversation we’re going to get back onto a topic we decided not to discuss.”

Emma laughed and nodded her agreement before signalling to a passing waiter that they wanted two more gin and tonics. The cocktails were indeed as good as she remembered them being and were quite delicious.

“Ok, so why don’t you tell me about this date you cancelled on to join me on this road trip,” Emma said, her heart racing a little. She had been wanting to ask Regina about her date ever since the brunette mentioned it in the car but hadn’t found the right moment. Apparently the combination of wine and gin, however, had finally given her enough of a push.

“Not much to say, to be honest,” Regina shrugged. “We met on New Year’s Eve but she had to work the next day so I took her number. It wasn’t until yesterday that I got around to texting her to arrange a date. I guess she’s not going to want to meet again after I bailed.”

“Maybe she’ll give you a second chance,” Emma said. “After all, she gave you her number so she clearly likes you.”

“Perhaps,” Regina shrugged. “We did get on well when we were chatting at the party and she seemed like a nice person. It’s just hard to tell how we would have truly connected without alcohol and high spirits and everything else which comes with a New Year’s bash.”

Emma nodded. She knew how it went. She had met a couple of people since Lily left when out with Ruby and Billy but in the cold light of day any interest she had in them had evaporated and she had not bothered to arrange further dates.

“What about you?” Regina asked. “Are you seeing anyone?”

Emma shook her head. “My life revolves around Henry,” she said. “Even before he got sick, I didn’t have time to date.”

“Must be lonely,” Regina observed. “Don’t you want someone around to support you and care for you too?”

“It’s not worth it,” Emma said with a shrug. “I trusted someone to become a part of our family once and she betrayed me. She betrayed us, actually. I’m not going to risk that happening again, not to Henry.”

Regina’s throat was suddenly dry and she reached for her newly delivered cocktail. There it was; proof that Emma had dated women in the past. Regina had suspected Emma to be interested in
women but this was the first tangible piece of evidence which proved the blonde to have been in relationships with women. Already she knew Emma was aware of her own sexual orientation and had appeared unfazed. Regina’s cheeks reddened slightly as she realised her mind was already racing ahead and imagining the two of them together. On a date. Holding hands. Kissing goodnight. Scattered clothes. Hot bodies. Tangled sheets.

“Um, so what was it like living in Bristol as a kid?” Regina asked, needing to force yet another subject change before her imagination ran away with her.

“Good,” Emma grinned. “I mean, I have nothing to compare it to. My various foster homes were dotted around the place and I never really settled before I moved again. This was my first place I really got to know and I loved it. And not just for the stability Mary and David offered me.”

“Sounds like you had it tough in the system,” Regina remarked.

“Yeah,” Emma shrugged. “There were some problems. Ones which your dad fought to get rectified, by the way.”

Regina smiled. “Yes, he was always rooting for better social care systems, especially for children.”

“Well, I hope his work has done some good,” Emma said. “Every kid deserves to find loving parents.”

“Or a loving mother,” Regina added. “Families don’t have to be nuclear to be loving. I think you and Henry prove that.”

“Thanks,” Emma said. “That means a lot. I try to do my best by him and most of the time I succeed but … there are times when I wish I wasn’t a single parent. Sometimes I need a little extra support.”

“You have Ruby,” Regina pointed out. “She seemed to really care about Henry.”

“Yeah, she and Billy are great,” Emma nodded. “But it’s not the same. Lily was …”

Emma tailed off. She had been about to say Lily had been a coparent of sorts. But that wasn’t true, not now. A parent didn’t leave. A parent didn’t abandon their son, regardless of the nature of their biological status. Henry might not have been Lily’s son by blood but that didn’t mean he didn’t think of her as a second mother and, Emma had thought, that Lily didn’t think of Henry as her little boy.

“More gin needed?” Regina asked, seeing the forlorn look on Emma’s face.

“I think so,” Emma nodded. She didn’t like to drink too much, especially when she was drinking to forget. But that night she needed to. With everything that had happened over the past week, she didn’t think she had the strength to deal with the psychological trauma which occurred when she went down Lily-memory-lane.

They fell silent for a time, watching the crowd in the bar which was steadily growing. Saturday nights in Bristol was always busy thanks to the two universities there and a large population of young professionals in the city. After a few minutes a waiter appeared with two more gin and tonics. As Emma sipped hers, she realised the bite of the alcoholic taste had subsided. She had clearly already drunk a fair amount and the drink slid down easily.

“So, you date women too?”
Apparently she wasn’t the only one feeling the effect of the alcohol. Emma placed her drink slowly back down onto the table and turned to her companion whose face was a little flushed after voicing her bold question.

“Um, I have,” Emma said after a pause. “Once. Just Lily.”

“Oh,” Regina said. “Ok.”

“You’re …”

“Gay? Yes,” Regina supplied. “Never even felt the need to experiment with men, to be honest. I’ve known I was only interested in women since I was fifteen.”

“Right,” Emma said, reaching for her drink once more. She suddenly felt rather hot and hoped the clinking ice in her glass would cool the raging heat she could feel in her cheeks.

“Does Henry know?” Regina asked. “I mean, what did he know about Lily?”

“He understood we were a couple,” Emma shrugged. “He was two when we got together, four when we broke up. He’s never really known anything else but he sees my parents and Ruby and Billy. I explained the basics to him I suppose and he knows I date women. Well, dated one woman.”

“No one since?”

Emma shook her head. “No.”

Regina took a moment to absorb the information. Two years was a long time to be alone but she understood Emma’s reasoning for not wanting to become involved in another relationship. She was protecting Henry and that was admirable. The awful thought entered her head that Henry was going to be hurt anyway by something beyond Emma’s control and that perhaps, if the worse happened, the blonde would be left alone with no one to help her pick up the pieces of her shattered world.

“Does Henry ever say anything about the fact that he doesn’t have a dad or second mum?” Regina asked.

Emma thought briefly about the few times Henry had asked her about his father. She had told him what she knew, which wasn’t much, and they hadn’t really discussed it in any great details. She knew her son wondered, and she did too when he probed. It was difficult being unable to answer the simplest questions about someone who had had such a profound impact on her life. She wished she could tell Henry a little more about the man who helped her make him. Perhaps, if they found Neal tomorrow, the man could help answer some of the questions their son had about where he came from.

“He’s asked me about women before, I guess,” Emma said without thinking.

“Really? Anyone in particular?” Regina asked just as carefree.

“You.”

Even though the cocktail bar was playing loud music, every sound was eclipsed to Regina as she stared at Emma, trying to take in what the blonde had just said. Henry had asked Emma about her? Henry had asked his mother if anything was happening between them? What had he picked up on? Was there even anything to pick up on? Was it obvious to others, to a six year old, that she was attracted to Emma? Was it obvious to the blonde herself that Regina was struggling with her
feelings? She suddenly realised she hadn’t spoken in a long time as Emma was staring curiously at her.

“Shit, sorry,” Regina said, flustered. “I zoned out for a moment.”

“Yeah, I got that. Are you ok?” Emma asked.

“Processing,” Regina nodded, taking a large gulp of her gin and tonic.

“Sorry,” Emma said. “I shouldn’t have told you what Henry said. It’s not appropriate.”

“Actually, you never did tell me exactly what Henry said,” Regina said, her curiosity temporarily taking control of her brain and locking sanity and reason and caution away for the night.

What was she doing? No, Regina, you can’t keep going down this path, she told herself. Nothing good could come from pursuing … whatever it was that was between them. And that was assuming Emma felt something the same was she did. It didn’t even matter if the blonde had feelings for her, she reminded herself. They were doctor and patient. Ok, doctor and patient’s mother. Alright, doctor and former patient’s mother. But still.

“He said it had been a long time since Lily left and that he liked you,” Emma was replying before Regina had even finished berating herself.

“Henry likes me?” Regina asked.

Emma laughed. “You know he does. You’re definitely his favourite doctor even though he really likes Doctor West.”

“And you?” Regina asked.

Emma bit her lip. “Yeah, you’re my favourite too.”

Regina beamed despite the dangerous waters she knew the two of them were negotiating. It was always nice to be appreciated for her work, especially by Emma Swan, she realised.

“So, um, did you say something to Henry about me?” Regina asked. “I mean, why was he saying all that to you about it being a long time since Lily?”

“Ruby and Billy,” Emma shrugged. “They, um, they said they saw you looking at me and that you were my type.”

“Am I your type?”

“Were you looking at me?” Emma countered.

Regina couldn’t help but laugh. Whatever was going on, Regina was enjoying spending time with Emma. She was different to her other … friends. Quick-witted, playful, honest. Yes, Regina mused, Emma was unlike anyone else she had ever met.

“I was,” Regina admitted slowly, eyes scanning the pale face before her.

“You are.”

The final words were barely a whisper and Regina would have missed them had her gaze not been locked on the rose-pink lips now just inches from her own.
Chapter End Notes

A/N: angry words for stopping there in the box below please!
A Tender Kiss

Chapter Notes

A/N: after writing for work for ten hours the momentum carried me forwards and I was able to create this for you all. Sorry about the delay after the cliffhanger. But .. well, sometimes life has to come before fan fiction sadly!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The music dimmed, the shout of fellow patrons faded away, the bustling bar before them no longer existed. All that mattered in that moment was the small, sheltered booth in which the two women were sat. Regina’s eyes closed just as Emma’s lips brushed against her own. Heart racing, the brunette let out a soft moan at the tender kiss, her body aching at once for more. As if reading her mind, Emma’s hands landed on Regina’s slender waist, pulling their bodies closer just as their lips parted. The plump flesh of Regina’s slid between Emma’s thinner pair, melding perfectly together as if they were made for one another. Regina allowed her fingers to trail up Emma’s arms, feeling the smooth leather until the material was replaced by blonde curls and the warmth of Emma’s neck.

At the skin on skin contact, Emma reeled backwards, suddenly aghast. She jumped to her feet, her thighs colliding with the edge of the table and sending their half-empty drinks flying. She didn’t seem to notice the tinkle of shattering glass, however, and before Regina could even comprehend what was happening, the blonde had disappeared into the crowd. Regina stared after her, mouth open in shock. What had just happened? Everyone in the vicinity of the booth was now staring at Regina whose cheeks were hotter than ever. She stood up and then stooped to help a waiter who had appeared to begin cleaning up the shards, any effects of the alcohol suddenly dissipating from her system.

Muttering her apologies, she pressed a £20 into his hand to cover their last round of drinks and as a tip for the mess she was leaving him with. Unable to stand the judgemental stares any longer, Regina grabbed her coat and Emma’s, which had been left on the seat where the blonde had just moments before, and left.

The rain had stopped when she reached the street and the orange light from the street lamp illuminated a damp, busy road, filled with people enjoying their Saturday night out. Huffing in annoyance and wishing she was a little bit taller, Regina craned her neck and scanned the crowd. She couldn’t see Emma, however and began to walk up the slight hill to get a better vantage point. She huddled up against the cold night air, Emma’s coat draped over her arm as she went, slapping lightly against her thigh and reminding her with every step that Emma had just run out of a bar and left her in the middle of a city she didn’t know with nowhere to go. She couldn’t help but feel a little bitter.

The crowd were all heading the other way and Regina side-stepped a particularly rowdy group of university aged students by stepping into an alleyway to avoid being knocked over. As she waited for them to pass, movement from behind her made her turn around sharply.

“Who’s there?” she asked, a hard London accent in place. She had been living in the capital city for too long to not know how to defend herself if necessary.

There was no response however, but a sliver of light from the streetlamp hit a figure slumped
against the wall a few metres away. Her suspicion as to who was there made her tone soften suddenly.

“Emma?”

The red jacket glinted as the blonde moved, craning her head to the side and realising that it was indeed Regina who had found her. Not that she had wanted to abandon the brunette, of course, she was just hoping for a little more time to collect her thoughts.

“Hey,” Emma said, voice rough.

Wordlessly, Regina handed over Emma’s coat and the blonde gratefully shrugged it on. She hadn’t realised she was cold until that moment. Once that task was done, Emma averted her eyes from the doctor, not wanting to yet see the hurt look she knew would be reflected in those beautiful brown eyes.

“Let’s get a cab,” Regina said after a long pause, any semblance of anger she felt towards the young woman melting away as she took in Emma’s dejected stance. She knew Emma wasn’t going to want to talk in the alleyway and she had no desire to continue their night out. The desire she was currently experiencing, it seemed, she was going to have to tamp down. Because despite the abrupt end and the way Emma had deserted her, the feelings their kiss had ignited within Regina still burned strong.

She led the way back to the street and wasn’t surprised to hear Emma plodding along behind her. The street was filled with cabs already and she hailed one quickly, climbing in first and waiting for Emma to do the same. She did but as soon as the door was closed and the address was given, the blonde pressed herself up against the door, as far away from Regina as physically possible. Regina tried to ignore the twisting feeling in her gut but by the time they had arrived at Emma’s parent’s house, her whole body felt consumed by the pain of rejection.

Emma tossed some money at the cabbie and climbed out without another word. Before Regina had even closed the door, the blonde had disappeared inside the house. With a sigh, Regina followed, shut the open door and bolted it. Footsteps on the landing above told her Emma was heading towards the bedroom in which she had put her bag in earlier. Fetching two glasses of water from the kitchen, Regina waited for a moment before ascending the stairs as well.

The door to the bedroom was closed so Regina knocked lightly on the wood, both waters balanced in one hand. There was no answer; Regina knocked again. This time, she heard something muffled from within but couldn’t decipher the words. She decided to assume they were consent. Although the room was dark, Regina could make out the shape of Emma huddled beneath the blankets on the bed. She crossed the near pitch-black room carefully and placed the glasses on the desk before sitting down on the computer chair beside it.

“Emma, are you ok?” Regina asked quietly.

“No,” came a childlike voice.

“What’s wrong?” Regina said, needing the blonde to vocalise what exactly has spooked her in the bar.

There was a pause before Emma answered. “I’m shouldn’t have kissed you.”

Regina had been expecting the answer, she supposed. After all, she herself knew she shouldn’t have kissed Emma. But her reasons were fairly obvious: her work forbade relationships between patents. She was unsure, however, exactly what it was that Emma thought was ‘wrong’ about what
had occurred between us. So she asked.

“Why not?”

Emma shuffled around in her bed, her face tilting curiously towards the brunette at the question.

“What do you mean?”

“Why do you think you shouldn’t have kissed me?” Regina repeated.

“Um, because you’re my son’s doctor?” Emma replied.

“I was Henry’s doctor,” Regina corrected. “But yes, I think the hospital wouldn’t exactly be thrilled to learn about any semblance of a relationship between us.”

“Exactly my point,” Emma said.

Regina nodded slowly. “But …” Regina tailed off, not sure whether she should push Emma any further. After all, they still had a road trip mission to complete and she didn’t want to make tomorrow any more awkward than it was already going to be.

“But what?” Emma asked after a long silence.

Regina took a deep breath. She never had been good at holding her tongue. “But I wanted you to kiss me.”

There was a pause and then movement as Emma pushed herself into a sitting position and reached for the bedside lamp. The light threw the room into harsh relief and both women blinked at the sudden brightness. When their eyes had adjusted, green finally gazed into brown.

“You did?” Emma asked.

“You know I did,” Regina said softly. “And if you hadn’t initiated something, I think I would have by the end of the night.”

“Even though the hospital forbids it?”

“I don’t think there’s a specific rule preventing former doctors to get involved with the mother of patients,” Regina smirked. “But yes, even if there was I would have defied it. I don’t allow my place of work to tell me who I can and can’t date.”

“Date?”

“Kiss,” Regina corrected hurriedly.

Emma’s eyes narrowed. “You said date.”

Regina bit her lip. “Yeah, I did,” she admitted. “Sorry.”

“Why are you apologising?” Emma asked.

Regina shrugged. “Because I know that’s not what you want nor what you’re ready for and now I’ve made things awkward.”

“I think they were already a little awkward,” Emma pointed out. “Did I leave a proper mess in that bar?”
“A few broken glasses and my pride,” Regina chuckled.

“Sorry,” Emma said. “I shouldn’t have run off like that.”

“Why did you?” Regina asked.

Emma glanced around the room which the two of them now sat. It was strange being back in her old bedroom, even stranger having Regina with her. Lily had been to Bristol a few times but no other lover had ever seen inside the four pale blue walls which had been the first bedroom she hadn’t had to share with another foster child.

“I was scared,” Emma admitted at last.

“Scared of what?” Regina said, her voice little more than a whisper.

“Of my feelings,” Emma replied. “I … it’s been a while since … you know. And I wasn’t quite ready for my body to … react like that.”

“Like what?” Regina asked, her heart beating a little faster.

Emma’s eyes met Regina’s once more. “I wanted you, Regina. More than I’ve wanted anyone in a long time. And I freaked out. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to leave you alone.”

“You wanted me?” Regina asked, ignoring the apology.

“Oh yeah,” Emma scoffed. “You’re sexier than anyone else I’ve ever met.”

Regina blushed at the brash compliment. “Thanks.”

Emma’s cheeks pinked too as she registered what she had said. It was true, of course, but she thought Regina deserved to be told in a slightly more eloquent way.

“You’re sexy too.”

The words reached Emma’s ears and made her look up, catching the shy smile on Regina’s lips. She couldn’t help but return it. They sat there, Emma in her bed and Regina on the old desk chair, grinning stupidly at one another. It was several minutes before either of them spoke.

“So, what now?” Regina asked.

“I don’t know,” Emma admitted, sobering once more. “What do you want?”

“I think you know what I want,” Regina said, her voice soft and reassuring. “I like you Emma. I really like you. And, given the chance, I’d like to see what there is between us. Because from where I’m sitting, I think we could be really great together.”

“But your work -.”

“Is my concern,” Regina interrupted. “And frankly it’s none of the hospital’s business. I’ll date whomever I wish. That is, if … I mean … what do you want?”

Regina had gotten so caught up in her own fantasy of Emma and the revelation that both women were attracted to one another that she had forgotten she hadn’t yet asked the blonde what she wanted.

“I don’t know,” Emma admitted, eyes wide and sorrowful. “I like you, Regina. Loads, actually. I’m
interested in you in a way I haven’t been in anyone since Lily. But what with everything going on with Henry and your connection to the hospital, I’m not sure either of us are in the best position to be starting something right now. I mean, my focus has to be Henry, one hundred per cent. I can’t start a relationship now, not when he’s so sick.”

Regina nodded her understanding. Of course Emma couldn’t start anything. Her son was suffering a rare genetic disease. Hell, the two of them were currently driving around the south of England trying to track down a man who was her son’s best chance of surviving the illness, chasing a long-forgotten one night stand. It was hardly the right time to begin anything.

“You’re right,” Regina said. “This can’t happen. Both of us need to be focusing on Henry at the moment.”

Emma nodded sadly. “I’m sorry,” she offered. “For what it’s worth. I do really like you and I appreciate everything you’ve done for Henry and the fact that you’re accompanying me on this crazy unplanned adventure. Really, Regina, thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Regina said. “But this adventure is far from over so,” she got to her feet, “I guess I’ll see you in the morning. Good night, Emma.”

Emma bid the brunette tonight too and watched as she walked from the room. At the door, Regina paused for a moment, hand hovering over the handle. Emma’s heart thumped wildly against her ribcage, knowing she’d be powerless to say no if the stunning woman turned back towards her with lust-filled eyes. And then she was gone, the door closing behind her with a quiet click. A breath Emma didn’t know she was holding escaped parted lips.

Ten minutes later, as Regina lay on her back staring at the ceiling in the guest bedroom, her mind was whirring as it retraced the events of the night. The feel of Emma’s lips on hers. The heat radiating from the blonde’s hands through her thin blouse. The look in Emma’s eyes when they had admitted their attraction to one another. The despondent tone of her voice when Emma had told Regina nothing could happen between them.

She had had to force herself to leave the room, her feet refusing to move for a moment as she headed towards the corridor. She had wanted to stay, wanted to turn around and fight for whatever was between them. It had barely started; a spark, a flurry of emotions, a flicker of hope and happiness. And she had wanted more. She had wanted to persuade Emma that they were good together, that it would work if they began a relationship. But she hadn’t.

Henry’s pale face swam into her mind, his tiny body lying beneath the standard-issue blue blanket, dwarfed by the familiar hospital bed. Emma’s son was the priority, he had to be. And right now, that meant everyone’s attention had to be on saving him. It wasn’t appropriate for Emma to start a new relationship, even with someone unconnected to the hospital. And Regina was most certainly off limits. It was too messy, too complicated, too much. And yet …

The floorboard outside Regina’s room creaked and she lifted her head off the pillow. The hall light was on and seconds later she heard a door close and the tap start to run in the bathroom. Emma must be doing her teeth, she mused as she laid her head back down.

With the blonde mere metres away it was even harder for Regina to try and sleep so she just lay there, waiting to hear Emma return to her room. Finally the toilet flushed and the door was unlocked. The now familiar floorboard creek sounded again but this time it wasn’t followed by footsteps. Regina’s breath hitched. She knew what that meant. Outside her room, in the pale landing light, stood Emma Swan. Why? Regina waited, nervously, for the blonde to make the next move.
A/N: ok, so what should Emma’s move be? I may or may not take your suggestions (I have my own idea for what happens next but would appreciate your input if you feel so inclined …)
Taking The Plunge

Chapter Notes

A/N: ok, so your reviews actually made me change my mind. I was going to make Emma walk away but …

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The seconds dragged on, blurring into one another until they became minutes. Regina lay there, shrouded in darkness. And silence. Complete silence. Not a creak of a floorboard nor a footstep to be heard. She was beginning to think she had imagined it and perhaps Emma had never even paused outside the guest bedroom when, at last, she heard it.

Knuckles rapped lightly on the door. Timid, unsure. Even after Regina’s answering call of permission to enter it took a moment before the handle turned and a chink of light split the blackness apart. Emma’s blonde head poked around the frame and Regina couldn’t make out her expressions against the brightness beyond. But she didn’t have to see Emma’s face to know why the blonde had come.

“It’s ok, Emma,” Regina said gently, sitting up in her bed and propping her back against a pillow. She waited for Emma to step further into the room, which she presently did, leaving the door ajar to illuminate the scene. Neither woman wanted the bedside lamp on. Somehow that was too … much.

Emma walked slowly into the room until she was stood beside the bed. Regina shuffled over, a silent invitation which Emma took and soon both women were sat side by side, one beneath the duvet, one awkwardly on top of it.

“Are you ok?” Regina asked after Emma still hadn’t said anything for a few moments.

There was a shrugging movement and then a sigh of frustration. “It’s not fair,” she murmured eventually.

“What isn’t?”

“Time. Fate. Whatever you want to call it. Why did I have to meet you now? When Henry’s so sick?”

Regina turned slightly towards Emma, the blonde’s ghostly features less than two feet away from her and eliciting memories from earlier events of that evening. She tried to tamp down the stirring between her thighs. Now was not the time.

“We met because of Henry,” Regina reminded Emma.

“And we can’t be together because of him,” Emma said, sounding a little bitter. She did not resent her son in any way, but the truth was that had he not been sick, Emma would definitely want to be with Regina, no hesitation.

Regina too considered the situation. She knew what Emma had said earlier. She knew that it was
important for Emma to focus on her son. But she also knew that Emma had come to her once more, had knocked on her bedroom door, had sat down on her bed. And she knew herself exactly what she wanted to happen between herself and the blonde.

“Who says?” Regina breathed into the darkness.

This time it was Emma who turned towards the woman beside her, allowing herself to drink in the woman sat so close to her once more. God, Regina really was beautiful, she mused. Even without a scrap of make-up on and her hair flattened by the earlier rain.

“I have to be there for Henry,” Emma said simply.

“And being with me would prevent that?” Regina asked. Because it wouldn’t, not really. Not if they always made sure to put Henry first, which, of course, they both would. Regina didn’t want to take Emma away from Henry; she wanted to be with her, be with them.

“Wouldn’t it make me a bad mother?” Emma said, her tone genuinely curious, as if she herself didn’t really know the true answer to the question. “Shouldn’t I be focusing on Henry and nothing else?”

“Henry is the most important person in your life,” Regina said. “But that doesn’t mean you have to neglect yourself to be a good mother. I mean, I’m probably not going to give you an unbiased opinion on this subject but do you not think that perhaps being with someone who can support you and be there for you when things get tough with Henry is actually going to be good? For everyone?”

Emma didn’t say anything but after a few seconds she shuffled a little closer to the brunette who lifted her arm and allowed Emma to burrow into her side. Regina let out a shuddering breath as she felt Emma rest her head against her shoulder, the warm body pressed against her shuddering slightly. Quiet sobs made Regina wrap her other arm around Emma and pull her even closer, a small attempt at comfort.

“It’s going to be ok, Emma,” Regina said softly, her hand stroking up and down the smooth skin of the younger woman’s arm. “Everything is going to be ok.”

“You don’t know that,” Emma sniffed back, tears falling from her eyes into the soft cotton of Regina’s pyjama top.

“No,” Regina admitted. “I don’t. But if you’d give me the chance, I’d like to be there to support you, whatever happens.”

“Really?” Emma said, shifting slightly so she could look up at Regina. It was dark but the now familiar features were a reassuring sight, smiling down at her. It was hard for Emma to trust after Lily; hard for her to accept that someone as amazing as Regina genuinely wanted her, wanted to be with her, wasn’t going to let her down. The look in those brown eyes, however, made Emma’s heart flutter and she knew, somehow, that Regina truly cared for her.

“Yeah,” Regina said. “I really like you, Emma. Of course I want to be there for you. And Henry. Both of you.”

“I’m scared,” Emma whispered, returning to her previous position, head nestled against the soft flesh of Regina’s breast.

Regina didn’t ask what Emma was scared of. It was obvious really. A sick son. Searching for a long-lost one night stand who was, hopefully, the key to her son’s survival. And Regina, a woman
whom Emma seemingly had feelings for and whatever was between them was clearly, quickly spiralling out of control. Whether that was a good thing or not, remained to be seen.

“It’s ok to be scared,” Regina murmured, pressing her lips to the soft blonde hair, unable to resist any longer. “I’m scared too.”

“Of what?” Emma asked, snuggling a little closer and feeling her body relax slightly in Regina’s arms. It had been a long time since anyone had held her like this. She missed the contact, the intimacy, the feeling of safety.

“I’m not great at dating, or with relationships,” Regina admitted. “I always seem to mess them up somehow. And I don’t want that to happen to us.”

“There’s an us?” Emma asked.

Regina could hear the smirk in the blonde’s voice as she spoke. She liked the way they could tease one another even during the hardest, most confusing situations.

“I think there was an us from the moment you knocked on this door tonight,” Regina pointed out. “I told you how I feel, Emma. I was just waiting for you to realise what you were feeling too.”

“Good job it didn’t take me long to figure it out,” Emma chuckled. “You don’t strike me as the most patient person.”

“Rude,” Regina said, elbowing Emma lightly so the blonde squirmed away before the brunette’s arm pulled her back into her side. “But no, I’m glad it didn’t take you long.”

Emma shifted so once more she was looking up at Regina. “I hadn’t planned to come in here, you know,” she said. “I was just going to brush my teeth and then go back to bed.”

“Why did you then?”

Pausing for a moment, Emma wondered how much to tell Regina, how much would be too much. But then she thought back over the events of the evening. It was obvious to both parties how much they were attracted to one another and how each were interested in pursuing some form of relationship between them. Emma knew she had said otherwise when curled in her bed less than half an hour earlier but internally her mind had been raging. She had wanted to leap out of bed and pull Regina into her arms, kiss her senseless, drag her back to bed, unbutton her blouse and … But she hadn’t. Her mothering instinct had told her it was a bad idea, that Henry was the priority. It had only been after Regina left that she began to think it through. Plenty of single parents dated, had successful relationships, got on with their lives. That didn’t mean Henry would be neglected. Emma would never let that happen.

And Regina; it was obvious the brunette cared about her son, not just because she had been his doctor. She knew Regina was invested in his treatment far beyond the requirements of the Hippocratic oath. After all, the woman was joining her on the road trip to find Neal. Emma internally cringed at the sudden awkwardness that was bound to occur when that topic was broached again. Regardless, Emma knew Regina didn’t want to take her away from Henry. She had said it herself, she wanted both of them. Emma tingled at the thought of being Regina’s possession. She had never liked that expression in the past, had always been independent and without need of anyone else, aside from Henry. But with Regina … the idea wasn’t so unappealing. So long as Regina belonged to her too.

Deciding to just tell the truth, Emma took a deep breath.
“I’ve never felt like this about anyone before,” Emma said eventually, eyes scanning Regina’s face for her reaction, a sign that it was too much, too fast, too soon.

There was a moment of silence and then Regina’s lips covered Emma’s once more. As soon as she had recovered from her surprise, Emma kissed the brunette back, wrapping her arm around Regina and pulling her closer. It didn’t matter that there was a duvet between them, it was the most turned on Emma had been in years. She whimpered as Regina’s tongue grazed against her lips and parted them willingly, welcoming the brunette into her mouth for the first time.

Lost in the taste of the blonde, Regina barely registered that there was still a barrier between them. Her hands skated up and down Emma’s back, drifting to the swell of her ass before returning to tease the soft hairs at the nape of her neck as their tongues danced. It was only when Emma’s own hands tried to grasp her butt through the duvet that Regina pulled away and, between them, they clumsily wrestled Emma beneath the covers too. Just before their mouths joined once more, Regina paused.

“Wait.”

Emma pulled back, eyes dark with desire. Regina’s suspected hers looked exactly the same.

“We’re taking this slow,” she said. “For our sake as much as Henry’s. I know, well, I know we’ve both been rather honest tonight about how we feel and I think there might be something pretty special here, right?”

“Right,” Emma said, leaning forwards and stealing a quick peck from Regina’s swollen lips.

“But I don’t we should rush anything, ok?”

“Agreed,” Emma nodded. “No rushing.”

There was a pause and then: “kissing’s ok though.”

No soon had the words left Regina’s mouth was Emma’s lips upon hers again, their bodies at last pressed against one another with nothing but their pyjamas between them. God, Regina thought to herself as Emma’s tongue traced patterns on the roof of her mouth, going slow with someone as gorgeous as Emma Swan is going to be the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

Emma woke first the next morning, uncomfortably warm beneath the duvet and … Regina. Any discomfort Emma was feeling faded away as she realised the brunette was wrapped around her, arm over her stomach, leg thrown over her thighs, face nestled into the side of her neck. A smile split wide over the blonde’s face as she regarded the doctor-shaped limpet currently attached to her. It felt good. Better than good, in fact. It felt … right. Emma closed her eyes, brought her arm around Regina’s back and drifted off again.

When she woke next time, the bed was empty. Frowning at how she, so often a light sleeper, had managed to stay asleep whilst Regina untangled their body, Emma threw back the covers and climbed out of the bed. She winced as her feet touched the cool wooden floor boards and detoured to her room for a pair of socks and her mobile before heading downstairs. The aroma of coffee had greeted her as soon as she opened the door to the guest bedroom and she suspected that was where her sleeping partner had disappeared to.

Sure enough Regina was standing in front of the stove, still dressed in her pyjamas, stirring something Emma couldn’t see. A French press steamed gently next to her. Unable to resist, Emma walked up behind Regina, wrapped her arms around the slim waist, and pressed a kiss to the
exposed neck of the beautiful woman.

“Good morning,” Regina said, a little surprised at the intimate act but pleased nonetheless.

It seemed Emma was shocked herself at the sudden scene of domesticity and untangled herself
before going in search of mugs.

“Morning, did you sleep well?”

“Wonderfully,” Regina said, now scraping the scrambled eggs from the pan onto two plates.
“You?”

“Very well,” Emma nodded, turning to the fridge only to discover there was no milk. “Despite the
koala I was sharing the bed with.”

Regina blushed slightly. “Sorry,” she said, fishing two slices of toast out of the toaster. “I … yeah,
I cuddle.”

“Yeah you do,” Emma laughed. “And no need to apologise, it was cute.”

“Cute?” Regina said, her nose wrinkling. She didn’t think anyone had called her cute since she was
about ten. But perhaps from Emma it didn’t sounds so bad.

“Yeah, cute,” Emma insisted. “And we have no milk, is that ok?”

“Black is good for me,” Regina nodded.

They sat down to their simple breakfast, once again both feeling awkward about how familiar they
both were with one another. After all, they were relative strangers. Ok, so Regina was privy to
some of the most intimate details of Emma’s family life and they’d had a few conversations about
their likes, dislikes and hobbies. But, frankly, they didn’t know one another well at all.

“So, you cook?” Emma asked, gesturing to the scrambled eggs.

Regina raised an eyebrow. “Hardly,” she said. “To be honest I don’t usually have the time what
with my work and the fact that I rarely have the energy once I’ve finished a long shift. I have a few
dishes I’m pretty good at but I wouldn’t consider my scrambled eggs amongst them, especially
given there was no milk.”

“Butter’s better,” Emma grinned.

“I used water,” Regina said, slightly appalled at the idea of adding a knob of artery clogging fat to
their breakfast.

“Gross,” Emma frowned.

“You just said you liked it,” Regina pointed out.

“Oh, yeah,” Emma said a little sheepishly.

“Do you cook?” Regina asked.

“Yeah,” Emma nodded. “Nothing fancy but I cook a meal every night for me and Henry. We try
to get takeaways at all. Too expensive and super unhealthy.”

“Says the woman who adds butter to her scrambled eggs.”
“Only in the absence of milk,” Emma protested.

“Well, I’m impressed anyway,” Regina said. “The art of cooking is being lost as these takeaway places make it easier than ever for us to get food right at our doorstep. No wonder we have an obesity crisis in this country.”

“Do you see it a lot at the hospital?”

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “Obesity doesn’t usually cause emergencies but we do find it more difficult to treat overweight people and there are certainly more of them these days. Their bodies are under so much more strain and they can develop all kinds of problems. And I suppose we see a fair amount of diabetes related emergencies, even in children.”

Emma didn’t reply; she suddenly realised she needed to speak to her son. Regina smiled sympathetically as the blonde pulled out her phone, tapped the screen a few times and help it to her ear.

“Hi Mum,” Emma said after a few seconds. “How’s everything going?”

Regina stood and began to clear the table, stacking up the now empty breakfast plates. Emma reached over and gripped the brunette’s wrist; a silent thank you before she got to her feet and headed out of the room. Regina washed up and put away everything she had used where she found it before heading upstairs and taking a shower. By the time she was washed and dressed once more, Emma was still on the phone to her son, talking animately about everything he had done over the weekend and telling him about Panther and Tiger in Bristol.

As soon as Emma saw Regina enter the living room where she was lying on her back on the sofa, she smiled and gestured the brunette towards her, shifting further into the cushions so Regina could perch beside her.

“Henry, kid, I’ve got to go now but I’m going to be back tomorrow and I’m going to bring someone special to see you,” Emma said, winking at Regina. “Be good for your grandparents please. I love you.”

“Love you too,” came the distant reply.

“Bye Henry,” Emma said before hanging up and dropping her phone onto the sofa.

Regina reached out and took Emma’s hand in hers. “How’s he doing?”

“Oh,” Emma said. “His fever is a little lower but Mum said he wouldn’t eat much for breakfast. Can you talk to him about that tomorrow? Maybe explain that he’s going to need to be strong for the bone marrow transplant?”

“Have you told him about the transplant?” Regina asked, ignoring the fact that Emma had not so subtly asked the brunette to come to her house after the road trip twice in the past minute. Of course she wanted to come, but she thought it would be wise for the two of them to have a conversation before that moment about how her arrival and the fact that Regina accompanied Emma on the road trip might look to both Henry and Emma’s parents.

“No,” Emma admitted. “I didn’t think it was necessary to scare him with the prospect of an operation we don’t even know if we have a donor for.”

“Well that’s what Cardiff is all about, right?” Regina said. “Do you want to get on the road soon or hang around here?”
The two women debated this for a while before deciding to drive to Cardiff once Emma was ready and spend the afternoon looking around the city’s castle. Emma also checked them into a hotel near the university as she doubted the two of them would find Neal in time to drive back to London. She had, after a moment’s deliberation, plumped for a twin bedroom, deciding it was too presumptuous to book a double. And anyway, they were supposed to be taking it slow, she reminded herself as she stood under the hot shower, washing away the stale smell of smoke and alcohol which clung to her hair after their night out.

And so, less than an hour later, the two women left the terrace house in Bristol and climbed back into Emma’s old yellow bug. It was so reminiscent of the previous day as they set off onto the busy city roads and yet, in just twenty-four hours, everything had changed. Regina glanced across at Emma and caught the blonde’s eye. They both smiled shyly, each thinking exactly the same thing. This might not have been how they had anticipated their road trip unfolding but both were extremely happy with the turn of events. Now all that was left to do was track down Neal, persuade him to donate his bone marrow to a son whose existence he was currently unaware of, and save Henry’s life. Regina knew it was a tall order, a difficult journey. But she also knew she wanted to be beside Emma and Henry every step of the way. If they’d have her, of course.

A hand drifted across the car and landed on Regina’s thigh, squeezing gently. Yes, Regina thought, it seems Emma at least, wanted her there. Her heart swelled as she settled back in her seat as the blonde merged seamlessly onto the M4 heading west.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The prolific use of the word ‘cuddle’ in almost every single review from the last chapter forced me to change the way the story went. Seriously, that’s how much your opinions matter to me and other writers. We really appreciate any feedback and want you to be involved in the journey and creation of our works too. So thank you! I hope you liked the way it played out.
A/N: I went to uni in Cardiff and hence know this city rather well. I didn’t want to get too nostalgic though and I know most of you are here for Emma and Regina’s chemistry rather than Welsh architecture …

The drive down to the capital city of Wales was pleasant enough and the sun broke through the clouds as they had peeled off the motorway. They chatted the whole time, getting to know each other as if they were on a rather strange date. Which, Emma supposed, they were. Although she doubted anyone had ever taken someone on a date which lasted three days and involved tracking down a former one night stand. But Regina didn’t seem to mind and at least it was original, if inadvertent.

As soon as they arrived in Cardiff, Emma and Regina checked into their hotel. The building was small and tucked away from the main road, the leafy car park now sporting a luminescent VW Beetle. The receptionist smiled knowingly at the two ladies as she handed over their key. Emma wondered how she had guessed there was anything going on between her and Regina; they were booked into a twin room after all. It didn’t really bother her, however. Who wouldn’t want to date someone as beautiful as Regina anyway? What Emma didn’t know was that it was obvious to anyone who saw the pair of them that the women were besotted with one another.

The room itself was bright and clean. Nothing special but both beds turned out to be doubles and the ensuite included a shower Emma was quite looking forward to testing out later. The pitiful water pressure in her London flat was one of the reasons she had considered moving a few years earlier. Regina put her bag on one bed and Emma the other, both women doubting they would really sleep separately, however, and neither minding the suspicion that they wouldn’t be.

They left the hotel and strolled down the wide avenue into the city. The castle walls dominated the scenery and Regina admired the ancient stonework as they passed. They ate a late lunch in a sandwich shop opposite before heading into the castle. It was busy, being a Sunday, but they still enjoyed their time and walked around taking in the history and the beauty until the sky broke and the usual Welsh weather returned.

“Well, three hours of sun was more than I was expecting,” Emma said as she huddled beneath Regina’s umbrella and they walked back towards the hotel.

“Agreed,” Regina said, gesturing to the umbrella as proof to her scepticism.

They hurried back down the damp and now dark streets, arriving arm in arm in the hotel lobby. The receptionist grinned at them again and offered to have some tea sent up to their room. Agreeing, Emma and Regina climbed up to their bedroom where they discarded their wet coats and boots before sitting down heavily on their respective beds.

“I hate winter,” Emma remarked, glowering past Regina and to the dark sky beyond.

“Me too,” Regina said, looking over her shoulder and taking in the grey scene. “Cardiff is
beautiful city but in the rain it really is quite depressing.”

“So’s London,” Emma pointed out.

“True,” Regina chuckled. “Perhaps it’s only in the countryside where you can almost see the grass becoming greener where rain isn’t so bad.”

“Perhaps indeed,” Emma nodded. “Maybe next time we take a road trip we’ll go somewhere other than cities.”

“Next time?” Regina asked, moving over to sit besides Emma. “And who will we be tracking down next time you drive me around the UK?”

“No one,” Emma laughed. “Just me, you and Henry. Once he’s better. How does that sound?”

“Like something I’m going to hold you to,” Regina grinned, leaning in to kiss Emma for the first time since they had arrived in Wales.

It was soft and gentle, a reassurance that everything they had discussed the previous evening still stood. They’d move slowly, they’d be cautious, Henry would always come first. But also, the press of lips upon lips reminded both women that whatever their situation, the passion and desire for one another was still there. Not that Regina nor Emma had ever doubted that. They were always catching the other stealing glances when they were together. The physical attraction was undeniable from both sides. Regina was used to being looked at in that way; people checked her out all the time. And people should have been checking Emma out but there was something about the way she presented herself which meant most observers understood she wasn’t available nor interested. If they looked regardless, Emma never noticed. But with Regina’s scorching gaze on her, Emma felt like the most beautiful woman in the world.

“So, what’s the plan for tonight?” Regina asked when the kiss ended several minutes later.

“The event at the union starts at 9,” Emma said. She had looked it up on the university’s Facebook page earlier. “But the bouncers will have to go early so I say we head up there at about eight thirty. That way we can speak to him before he starts his shift and not when he’s flirting with eighteen year olds.”

Regina laughed at the way Emma wrinkled her nose in disgust. She could imagine the sort of bouncer Neal was going to be. She’d experienced her fair share of them in London and had had to restrain herself from kicking the leering men in the nuts more times than she could count.

“Sounds like a great idea,” Regina said. “Would you like to eat beforehand?”

“Sure,” Emma said. “Are you hungry now?”

“No particularly,” Regina said, just as there was a knock at the door.

The brunette rose to greet the waiter who had brought them the pot of tea. She thanked him and returned to the room where Emma was now lying on the bed. Resisting the urge to climb on top of the blonde, Regina busied herself pouring the drinks and by the time she had finished, Emma had rolled onto her side and was watching Regina.

“Milk?”

“Please,” Emma nodded.
“Sugar?”

Emma pulled a face and shook her head. Regina carried over the fresh cup of tea and placed it gently on the bedside table before perching once more on her own bed. Emma looked away, suddenly feeling a little awkward about their situation. Sitting in a twin bedroom in the middle of Cardiff waiting for a one night stand of hers to come on shift so they could ask him to save the life of his son Neal didn’t even know existed.

“Hey, Emma,” Regina said softly. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Emma replied, forcing herself to smile at the brunette who was peering curiously at her.

“You’re a terrible liar,” Regina replied. “You were fine a minute ago and now you’re not. What are you thinking about?”

Emma sighed. “Is this the worst date ever?” she said bluntly.

Regina’s eyebrows rose. She hadn’t even really considered the fact that what the two of them were doing could be construed as a date. She supposed it had some date-like qualities to it. The meals they’d shared, the drinks, the hotel room even. But it wasn’t a date, was it?

“I hadn’t really thought about it,” Regina said. “I mean, the nature of our … relationship,” Emma didn’t even react to the use of the word, “has changed somewhat over the last two days. This started off as a trip to find Henry a donor and that’s what it is. The fact that something more has evolved between the two of us complicates its definition I suppose but even with that, I wasn’t really thinking of this as a date.”

“Good,” Emma said quickly. “Because I can do much better than this.”

“Better than driving me around the south of the UK looking for an old flame?” Regina chuckled. “I’m sure you can.”

“Neal wasn’t a flame,” Emma said quickly. “That implies there was something between us which there most definitely wasn’t. Except for tequila. There was a lot of tequila between us.”

Regina laughed and moved to sit beside Emma again, causing the blonde to beam at her. “Don’t worry, Emma. I’ll give you another chance to impress me with your date planning skills when we get back to London. How does that sound?”

“Perfect,” Emma said, kissing Regina softly on the lips. “Now, we have a couple of hours until we should go for dinner. What do you want to do with that time?”

Regina’s eyes darkened at the suggestive tone in Emma’s voice and the blonde squealed as she found herself lying on her back, the older woman on top of her and their mouths fused together. She kissed back at once, eager to get another taste of Regina. The forgotten tea lingered on the doctor’s tongue as Emma rolled over, forcing Regina onto her back as she began to assert her dominance. Emma had always been a top in the bedroom but she suspected by the way Regina’s fingernails were digging into her waist lightly that she may be challenged when it came to this new woman in her life. She didn’t mind however, and when Regina flipped them again two minutes later, Emma willingly opened her legs wider and cradled Regina between them as the kiss continued.

The angry sound of a car horn broke the kiss over an hour later. Pulling away reluctantly, Regina
glanced towards the dark window beyond which a road rage incident was playing out. She rolled off Emma and licked her kiss-swollen lips, breathing hard. Emma turned onto her side, propping herself up on her elbow to peer at the time on her phone.

“It’s almost seven,” Emma said. “We should get moving if we want to have dinner before we head to the union.”

“Ok,” Regina said, craning her neck up to kiss Emma’s lips once more, already addicted to the feel of the blonde against her.

The kiss lasted longer than she had intended and it took ten minutes for Regina to extricate herself once more. Climbing from the mussed bedsheets, she ran her fingers through her hair and straightened her top. Emma sat up and did the same. It was no use; the flushed cheeks and tangled hair made it blatantly obvious they had just emerged from a heavy make-out session. She smiled almost shyly at Regina, feeling a little childish at how intense their kissing had become. It hadn’t moved beyond that. Although both women had felt the heat pooling between their thighs, they knew it wasn’t the time nor the place to take their relationship to the next level. Much as they wanted to, they had silently agreed to wait a little longer before having sex.

So now Regina was slightly frustrated and Emma was sat cross legged on the bed, trying to comb her tangled hair with her fingertips.

“You’re the cutest person I’ve ever met,” Regina laughed when she caught Emma’s eye and the blonde turned away.

“Cute,” Emma mock grumbled. “I don’t think I want to be cute. It doesn’t sound like a compliment unless you’re a puppy.”

Regina chuckled. “You called me cute this morning,” she reminded the blonde. “And I can promise you it is a compliment when it comes to the way you look when you get all hot and bothered in bed with me. Why were you blushing?”

Emma shrugged. It seemed foolish to be embarrassed to talk about kissing after the two of them had been lost in one another’s mouths for the past hour. But Emma had never really been great at talking about her likes and dislikes in bed. She found it awkward and always got too nervous to voice her desires.

Whilst Emma was off in her own thoughts, Regina climbed back onto the bed and sat beside the blonde. “You’re an amazing kisser,” Regina said quietly, sensing the blonde needed some reassurance.

“Really?” Emma asked. “Because, well, it’s been a while. I was worried I’d be … rusty.”

“Not at all,” Regina said. “Perfectly oiled, in fact,” Regina said with a wink before she hopped off the bed, grabbed her wash bag and sashayed into the bathroom, leaving an open mouthed Emma sat on the rumbled bedding.

Once Regina had washed her face, Emma disappeared into the bathroom too with a fresh change of clothes. They may have been making out and clearly interested in pursuing some semblance of a relationship but that didn’t mean the two women were at the point of changing in front of one another yet. The first time they each saw the other naked it needed to be special, not perfunctory.

Emma emerged from the bathroom, clad in black skinny jeans and a sheer black blouse. Her lace bra beneath had been glaringly obvious in the bathroom but in the muted light of the bedroom she
decided it was acceptable.

“Do I look - Regina?” Emma frowned, realising she was talking to an empty room as she rounded the corner.

Turning around, she looked towards the door but there was only a closet behind her. She walked to the window, wondering if there had been a balcony beyond she hadn’t noticed. There wasn’t. Emma bit her lip. Had Regina left? Just as the thoughts began to spiral through her mind, there was a knock at the door. Emma hurried to answer it, still confused. Pulling it open, her jaw hit the ground.

“Fuck.”

“Good evening,” Regina said primly. “I’m here to pick a Miss Emma Swan up for our first date.”

Emma clamped her mouth shut and stared at the woman before her. She was completely lost for words. Regina smirked and stepped smartly into the room, pushing it gently shut and waiting for Emma to regain the power of speech.

“Are you ok, dear?” Regina asked after almost a minute of complete silence with Emma simply staring at her.

“Is that … leather?” Emma asked, voice a little raspy.

“It is,” Regina said, smoothing her hands down the red material of her dress.

“You brought a leather dress and gold stilettos on our road trip?” Emma asked, incredulously eyes drinking in the stunning woman before her.

“I packed a variety of outfits,” Regina shrugged. “I thought this would have been inappropriate in Bristol but for a nice dinner at a fancy restaurant, which is what I have planned by the way, I think it works.”

“Fancy restaurant?” Emma asked. “What are you talking about?”

“This is our first date, Emma,” Regina said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Now, are you ready? We’ll miss our reservation if we don’t get a move on. You look beautiful by the way.”

Emma nodded dumbly and, grabbing her bag and coat, followed Regina from the room, eyes glued to the leather-clad ass in front of her until Regina’s own coat covered it up. It was probably best, Emma decided; it was polite to walk down the street beside your date, not behind them.

The restaurant wasn’t actually busy and Regina hadn’t needed the reservation she had made earlier when Emma had been in the bathroom. They were shown to a table in the corner, candlelight flickering off the dark blue walls and casting long shadows through the atmospheric gloom. Regina wasn’t sure when restaurant designers had decided not being able to see the food being served was a good thing but she was pleased when the waiter brought over a second candle and the space lightened a little.

“Better,” she remarked. “I felt like I was in a crypt.”

“Morbid,” Emma laughed, picking up the embossed menu. She didn’t think she’d ever been somewhere so fancy as she smoothed her hand over the fabric of the cover before allowing the
menu to fall open. Along with her mouth as she saw the prices. Jesus, she thought to herself, if this is the sort of place Regina usually eats at, I’m going to be saving for months before I can take her on a date.

“I wanted it to be special,” Regina said, noting Emma’s reaction to the admittedly exorbitant prices. “I don’t usually eat in places like this.”

“Me neither,” Emma said.

“Do you want to go? We passed a Subway on the walk down. We can just go back and have something basic if you like.”

Emma shook her head. “No way are you walking into a Subway dressed like that,” she said vehemently, eyes roving over the once again displayed red leather dress. “No sandwich is worthy of this view.”

Regina laughed and waved the waiter over. She spoke quickly and Emma caught the name of a wine and a few dishes filled with French words before the man departed with a small nod.

“Did you just order for me?” Emma asked.

Regina blushed. “Um, yeah, sorry,” she said. “I just thought it would take the pressure off. I got us a few small dishes so we could share, is that ok?”

Emma nodded. No one had ever ordered for her before. She wasn’t sure how she felt about it?

“How was Henry?” Regina asked, steering the date back onto a safe subject. Well as safe as any discussion was which involved a very ill child. Emma had called her son whilst Regina was getting ready in their hotel room.

“Tired but ok,” Emma said. “He’d eaten a little bit of his dinner so that’s good news. Mum said he slept most of the day. Again, rest is good, right?”

“Right,” Regina nodded. “We need his body to be as strong as possible in the run up to the bone marrow transplant.”

Emma’s face paled at the thought. She hadn’t really allowed herself to think about that aspect of their mission. She had been so intent on finding Neal that she had completely forgotten that if the man was a donor match and agreed to give some of his bone marrow to Henry, then the boy would be undergoing a dangerous and painful procedure himself. She could feel her lip trembling just as Regina’s hand landed on hers, squeezing softly.

“Hey,” she said quietly. “It’s going to be ok.”

“Is it?” Emma asked. “What if Neal says no?”

“We haven’t asked him yet,” Regina pointed out. “Do you have a plan of action, by the way?”

“No,” Emma said, “but can we actually just change the subject entirely? I don’t want to talk about Henry because it makes me too sad and I sure as hell don’t want to talk about Neal with you on our first date because that’s just strange.”

“Of course,” Regina nodded understandingly. “So, what’s your favourite movie?”

It was cliche but it had the desire effect because Emma burst out laughing just as the waiter arrived
with the most expensive bottle of wine Emma had ever drunk.

The food was delicious. Every single dish was exquisite leaving Emma very impressed both with Regina’s choice of restaurant and her ordering abilities. She didn’t even want to know how much it all came to but Regina waved off Emma’s protests when she refused the blonde’s credit card and insisted the waiter charge it all to her own.

“This was our first date, remember?” Regina said. “I want to do this for you. For us.”


“You are most welcome,” Regina said, standing up from their table and wriggling a little to move the leather dress down her body. Emma’s mind short circuited and Regina rolled her eyes at the dumbstruck look on her date’s face. “If I had known you have a fetish for leather I wouldn’t have worn this dress until at least our third date.”

Emma blushed. “I don’t have a leather fetish,” the blonde said, a little too loudly for the calibre of the restaurant. “Do I?” she added.

Regina just winked at her, laced their fingers together, making sure to pull Emma’s knuckles against the body-warmed material at the top of her thigh, and led the way out of the restaurant.

“Come on,” Regina said as they reached the cold, dark Cardiff street. “Let’s go and find Neal and save Henry.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Thanks once again for all of the lovely reviews, favourites, follows and PMs. As a side note, my Missed SwanQueen Moments Season 6 will be restarting along with the show. Chapter should be up some time on Monday or Tuesday (depending on your time zone and my workload). For those of you unfamiliar, I take a single line of SwanQueen dialogue from each Once episode and write an alternative scene, often smutty. It’s taken me 18 months but I’m actually up to date so I post along with the show now. Check out the old ones for seasons 1 - 5 and the first half of 6 now.
Enter Henry's Father

Chapter Notes

A/N: I quite liked writing this descriptive start. Took me back to my uni days. The number of times I trekked up to that Union …

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The road which led to the Student’s Union was a wide, leafy avenue. Although Cardiff wasn’t a campus university, over the years they had bought up the grand Victorian houses which lined the Park Place until they owned most of it. Regina and Emma walked past various departments and offices hand in hand. Emma hadn’t said much since they had left the restaurant. It suddenly dawned on her that what she was about to do was going to be … unorthodox. She wasn’t just asking the father of her son, their son, for some bone marrow, she was breaking the news that he had a son in the first place. Ok, she had gotten pregnant from a one night stand so the fact that he didn’t know wasn’t necessarily surprising. But tracking him down seven years later? She felt almost cheeky asking him when he didn’t know Henry; didn’t love him, didn’t care for him. Because she had never given him the chance to. What if Neal didn’t want to know? What if he was angry with Emma for not telling him sooner? What if he was angry at Emma for telling him now?

“It’s going to be fine.”

Regina’s reassuring voice pulled Emma from her thoughts. She started slightly, realising they had stopped outside the familiar Union building. She didn’t even know if she herself or Regina had halted their progress, so zoned out had she been.

“Is it?” Emma asked Regina. “How do you know?”

“Because I have faith in you,” the brunette replied simply. “And I know that parents would do anything for their children, regardless of the circumstances.”

“Will you come up with me?” Emma asked, glancing apprehensively at the foot of the staircase which led to the Union entrance.

“Of course,” Regina said. “But I think you should do the talking. I’ll just be there for support, as a friend. Probably best not to mention I’m Henry’s unofficial doctor.”

Emma nodded her agreement, took a deep breath, and led the way over to the steps. She climbed steadily, turning the corners and gripping onto the railing, ignoring the fact that it was sticky and the paint was flaking off on her skin. It was keeping her grounded, safe. Without that railing, she wasn’t sure she’d have made the top.

The doors stood open but no one was outside. It was also quiet. The club night didn’t start for another thirty minutes and even then no one came to the Union much before midnight anyway. Emma felt Regina come to stand beside her, looking around.

“What now?” Emma asked.

“We wait for him to come out?” Regina suggested. “They’re probably having a briefing or -“
Before Regina had finished they heard voices inside, laughing and talking loudly. Presumably the pre-shift meeting had indeed just finished. Emma froze as she watched the dark shadow of two men walk down the corridor towards where she and Regina were stood outside. As they stepped outside, however, she realised neither one was Neal although judging from their outfits and the radios clipped to their hips, they were indeed bouncers.

“Evening, loves,” the taller, dark haired man said. “You’re keen.”

“Um, yeah, actually I’m looking for someone who works here. Neal Cassidy?” Emma said, glancing between the bouncers.

“Cassidy, eh?” the man replied. “What’s with that guy and blondes?”

The shorter bouncer guffawed stupidly. Regina shot him a scathing look and he stopped at once, cheeks flushed.

“Is he here?” Emma asked, ignoring the comment.

“Yeah, he’s just out the back getting changed. He’ll be here in a few.”

“Thank you,” Emma said.

She turned to Regina who was still looking displeasingly at the two men. Emma steered her by the elbow over to the railing a little way away, leaning side by side and looking out onto the dark Cardiff street.

“Well, at least we’ve found him,” Emma said. “Now comes the hard bit.”

“You’ll be fine,” Regina assured her, lacing their fingers together and squeezing Emma’s hand gently.

Emma didn’t reply but she did squeeze back, smiling weakly at her companion before turning her attention to the quiet road beneath them; anything to avoid looking at the pair of bouncers she knew were watching them with interest.

Presently, a distant thump of footsteps could be heard. Emma’s fingers tightened their grip on Regina’s before they reluctantly slid from her grasp. She didn’t turn around, however, as she heard Neal emerge from the Union building.

“Cassidy, you have a visitor,” the shorter bouncer said, his Welsh accent thick.

“Oh yeah? Who?”

Emma didn’t even recognise his voice, she realised as she turned around. But then again, they hadn’t exactly done a lot of talking that night. The man, however, she knew in an instant was her son’s father. His eyes, she realised, were identical to Henry’s. A short intake of breath from Regina told Emma the doctor had noticed the similarity too. Neal peered at her curiously, brain desperately trying to place her.

“Emma,” the blonde supplied. “The Rabbit Hole in Bristol. Seven years ago.”

Neal looked a little guilty. It was obvious he didn’t remember her. Emma didn’t feel too insulted. She couldn’t really remember many details of that night and she was sure it would have faded from her memory entirely had Henry not been a product of it.
“Right, hi,” Neal said after a fraction too long. “How are you?”

“I’m good thanks,” Emma said. “How are you?”

Regina cringed at the awkward exchange but did nothing. She just stood, a little behind Emma, a silent support figure.

“Yeah, I’m good.” Neal said, glancing momentarily at the brunette. His eyes faltered briefly in appreciation before snapping them back to Emma. Blondes had always been his weakness. “Um, so, Ella, what are you doing here?”

“Emma,” Regina corrected before she could stop herself.

Neal just shrugged and turned his attention to the young blonde. Well, not as young as the students who paraded past him every night but young enough. And, seemingly, the two of them had spent a night together. Quite the night, he mused to himself, if she was looking him up seven years later.

“Can we talk somewhere private?” Emma asked, conscious that two of Neal’s colleagues were listening curiously behind the little group and suspecting the man might not want his fellow bouncers to find out about his son the same moment he did.

“Sure,” Neal said, beckoning them to follow him into the building. The two women did, Regina narrowing her eyes a final time at the smirking Welsh man before hurrying to catch Emma up just as Neal was leading her into a small meeting room. Once they’d settled in their chairs, Neal spread his arms wide, inviting the conversation to continue.

“Um, so I’m guessing you don’t remember but we … spent the night together in Bristol about seven years ago.”

“I assumed as much,” Neal said. “I’m, well, I’m sorry I don’t remember you. I must have been crazy drunk because you’re hot.” Regina felt a flare of jealousy. “But I was always drunk at The Rabbit Hole so that explains it.”

“It’s fine,” Emma said. “I was drunk too. Stupid and drunk.”

“Sounds like a fun night,” Neal winked. Regina bit her lip, physically biting back a retort. “So why are you here now?”

Emma steeled herself. This was it. “That night we spent together, it appears we neglected to use a condom and -”

“Damn it, are you the chick who gave me gonorrhoea?” Neal interrupted.


“Oh, ok, continue,” Neal said, not a hint of embarrassment.

Reassured by the fact her own STI screening had come back clean before she had given birth to Henry and making a mental note to tell Regina this later, Emma continued. “No, I didn’t give you anything but it seems you gave something to me, in a way.”

“An STI?”

“A baby.”

There was a long, heavy silence. Emma waited patiently. She knew Neal needed time to process
what she had told him. Hell, it had taken her weeks to accept the news when she found out she was pregnant.

“I have a kid?” Neal said eventually.

“A son,” Emma nodded. “His name is Henry and he turned six in August.”

“Oh.”

Fair enough, Emma mused. What else are you supposed to say when a one night stand reappears years after the fact to inform you they have been raising their son for the past six years without their knowledge?

“Why are you here telling me now?” Neal asked. “In fact, how did you find me?”

“The bartender at The Rabbit Hole told us you had a job here,” Emma said. “And as for the timing, Henry’s sick.”

“Sick?”

Emma nodded. “He has a disease and he needs surgery. It’s … urgent.”

The information sank in slowly and Regina could practically hear the cogs turning in Neal’s brain as he processed the information. She knew it was wrong to judge people after only spending a few minutes with them but she got the feeling Neal wasn’t the brightest.

“You need something from me. From my body, right?”

Or perhaps he was capable of putting two and two together, Regina mused.

Emma nodded. “Yeah. Well, Henry needs it. I can’t donate myself and my parents aren’t a match. We were desperate and there was no one else I could think of so I came to find you. I know it’s a huge ask to -”

“To harvest my organs?”

“Bone marrow,” Emma corrected. “And I know this is such a fucked up way to meet me again and to learn you have a son but … we’re desperate.”

“Bone marrow?” Neal frowned. “Doesn’t that involve a massive needle being inserted into my hip?”

“Henry has to undergo the exact same treatment and he’s six years old,” Emma shot back, anger rising unbidden in her.

Neal fell silent. He didn’t know how to react to that. To be honest, it wasn’t the thought of the procedure that was flooding through his mind. He was still trying to wrap his head around the fact that somewhere, with a woman called Emma he didn’t even remember, had been raising his son for the past six years without his knowledge. He had never wanted kids. Hell, we was only twenty six himself. But the fact that he had never known Henry even existed irked him.

“I know it’s a lot to take in,” Emma said, “and I don’t need an answer today. You might not even be a match but if you were willing to get tested to find out if you were it would mean the world to me. And Henry,” she added.

Neal nodded but said nothing. Emma got to her feet, pulled one of her business cards and a
photograph from her pocket and handed them to the man.

“Think about it and give me a call, ok?” the blonde said, knowing there was nothing more she could do now she had told Neal what she and Henry needed from him.

Regina was standing too and, together, the women headed towards the door.

“This is my kid?” They turned back to see Neal holding up the photograph Emma had given him. It was of their son on his six birthday, grinning widely into the camera from the top of a slide in their local playground, sun shining in a brilliant blue sky and a party hat perched jauntily on top of the young boy’s head. That day was one of Emma’s favourite memories of her son; they had spent such a wonderful in the park and then later had a party with some of his friends from nursery. She couldn’t remember seeing him happier. And she sincerely hoped he would smile that widely again very soon.


“He’s really sick?”

“Very,” Emma nodded, a lump in her throat at the verbal acknowledgement.

Neal returned to staring at the photo of his son, holding the image almost reverently between his fingers. Regina and Emma left without another word.

Into the darkness of their hotel room, lying in one another’s arms over an hour later, Emma spoke for the first time since they had left Neal in the Union.

“Do you think he’ll call?”

“I don’t know,” Regina answered honestly, pulling the blonde closer to her.

The pair had walked back to their hotel, changed into their pyjamas and climbed into the bed on which they had engaged in their make-out session earlier. Nothing sexual had happened between them, however, but they had immediately gravitated to one another beneath the covers. Regina was relieved Emma wanted the physical closeness and Emma herself simply needed to feel the brunette beside her. She was nestled into Regina’s side, head resting on Regina’s chest, despite being taller. Her toes were therefore sticking out beneath the end of the duvet but she didn’t care. She needed this. She needed to feel Regina’s arms wrapped around her. She needed to feel safe.

“He’s the best chance Henry has,” Emma said quietly.

“‘He is but he’s not the only chance,’” Regina reminded her. After all, people signed up to donate bone marrow all the time. It would just mean Henry waiting on the register for a while. She hadn’t mentioned to Emma that the longer they waited, the greater the chance of Henry developing leukaemia or another form of cancer was. She didn’t need to tell Emma that yet. There was still hope.

“So you think he won’t call?”

“I didn’t say that,” Regina said, fingers stroking up and down Emma’s arm. “I think he’s got a lot to think about, process, deal with. He didn’t seem like the brightest chap, no offence to your drunken taste, dear, so it may take time.”

Emma chuckled. She couldn’t help herself. The fact that she had taken Regina with her to meet an
old one night stand and then that the two of them could joke about it was surely a good, if unusual, sign.

“Well, last night my drunken taste was better, wouldn’t you agree?” Emma said, looking up at Regina through the darkness.

“I would,” Regina grinned, kissing the offered lips softly.

Emma kissed her back, encouraging the contact. She needed it, just like she needed Regina’s arms around her. It was reassuring, confirmation that Regina still wanted her. Because Emma wanted Regina. She had been denying how she felt about the brunette because of Henry but now … now the strength and depth of her feelings for Regina were almost scaring her. In a good way, she supposed, but they were scary nonetheless. After Lily she didn’t think she was going to ever find someone with whom she could trust her heart, for whom she could let down those walls. But then along came Regina …

The pair drove back to London the following morning. Emma apologised to Regina for taking up all of her weekend and then some but the doctor insisted she didn’t mind. It might have been an unorthodox road trip but she had enjoyed it. Some of it immensely. And she told Emma that as the blonde pulled up outside her apartment complex.

“Call me if you hear from Neal?” Regina asked as Emma, ever chivalrous, got her back from the boot of the car.

“Of course,” Emma said, handing over the luggage. “Thanks again, for coming with me.”

“Thanks for inviting me,” Regina said. “Something good came from it, even if Neal doesn’t call. I suspect without having spent that time together you would have never been brave enough to make a move.”

Emma laughed. “Probably not,” she conceded. “Although I think it was more the gin and tonics you were plying me with that did it.”

“Are you complaining?”

“Never,” Emma said, stepping forward and wrapping her arms around Regina. They kissed slowly, a tender movement full of promise and reassurance. They didn’t care that they were standing in the middle of the street. In that moment, both women needed to know that what had occurred between them away from the capital city and their busy, hectic lives was still there, was still wanted, was still real.

“I’ll see you soon,” Regina said.

“I hope so,” Emma said as she climbed back into her car.

Regina waved as Emma pulled away and then turned to open the gate, her heart fluttering with content.

“Mum!” Henry’s excited cry from the sofa was followed by the little boy trying to untangle himself from the excessive pile of blankets his grandmother had heaped on top of him. Before he could do so, however, Emma had crossed the apartment and engulfed him in a hug. She held him tightly against her, breathing in his familiar, comforting smell.
“Hi, kid,” she murmured. “I missed you so much.”

“I missed you too,” Henry said when his mother eventually released him. “Why did you have to go away?”

“I needed to go and see someone who might be able to make you better,” she informed him, tucking her son back into his cocoon. She had always avoided lying to Henry and she had decided that given her road trip involved him, there was no reason not to tell him. She just wasn’t going to get his hopes up just yet. “How are you feeling?”


“Even under this mountain?” Emma asked, winking at her own mother who was perched by her son’s feet. “Hi Mum.”

“Hi Sweetie,” Mary replied, standing up to hug her daughter. “Did you have a good trip.”

“I hope so,” Emma said with a look that said ‘I’ll tell you later’. “Where’s Dad?”

“Getting more food in,” Mary said. “Henry wants beans on toast for lunch but we ran out of bread. If you need anything I can phone him and he can pick it up.”

“I’m good as long as there’s milk and coffee,” Emma said. “You’re appetite is back, Henry?”

“Sometimes,” the boy shrugged, his eyes returned to watching the television. “Mum, come see this. It’s a new film Grandma bought me.”

“Oh?” Emma asked, sliding herself onto the couch behind Henry and pulling him into her lap. “What is it?”

“It’s called Zootopoli,” Henry announced as his mother’s arms wrapped around him.

“Zootropolis,” Emma corrected. “Is it good?”

“Yes but shush because I’m watching,” Henry said.

Emma laughed and pulled Henry closer against her. He snuggled contently into her familiar shape and continued to watch. Mary smiled at the sight, hoping the pain she felt at her grandson’s illness didn’t show on her face. She had been doing a lot of research since her daughter was away and had been petrified by what she had found out. She really hoped Emma had managed to find Henry’s father because without a familial match, the little boy was going to be in for a long, painful wait.

It wasn’t until Henry was in bed and asleep soon after seven that Emma, David and Mary sat down to talk about the previous three days. She thanked her parents profusely for having looked after her son although they reassured her that it had been their pleasure. She supposed Henry wasn’t his usual bundle of energy so it hadn’t been taxing. Spending time with sick kid wasn’t exactly fun though even if it was easier.

“Did you find him?” Mary asked her daughter.

“I did,” Emma nodded. “In Cardiff, actually.”

“And?”

“And he said he’d think about it,” Emma said.
“What does that mean?” David frowned. He would have done anything to have children of his own so the idea of not jumping at the chance to save Henry was absurd to him. He didn’t like this man, he decided, even if he had given him one half of his grandson.

“He’s processing,” Emma reasoned. “I did rather drop a bombshell on him. I asked him to call me when he had made a decision.”

All three of them turned to look at Emma’s phone which was lying on the coffee table. The screen stayed resolutely blank. Emma closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. She knew she needed to be strong for Henry but with every passing second that phone didn’t ring she could feel her son slipping away from her. Mary’s arms encircled her daughter and Emma crumbled against the older woman, sobbing freely for the first time since she had been told about Henry’s illness. The week of stress and pain and fear and aching, never-ending, all-consuming maternal love flooded out. David joined the huddle, his own eyes shining as he wrapped his arms around his family, a feeling of helplessness overwhelming him.

The vibration against the wood was abrasive and harsh in the quiet room. The group broke apart, three sets of eyes locked on the mobile now illuminated and buzzing angrily. Glancing at both her parents, Emma reached forward.

Chapter End Notes


A/N: I mentioned on Twitter that anyone who guessed correctly what would happen in the phone call could submit a prompt. Congratulations Wolfwarrior1124 - I’ve sent you a DM on fanfic.net. Prompt away! To the rest of you, did you really think I wasn’t going to make you wait a little longer to find out what Neal says? Come on, you know me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hello?”

“Hey, how are you doing?”

“Oh, Regina, hi,” Emma said, standing up from the sofa and walking away from her parents and into her bedroom. “Yeah, I’m ok.”

“You don’t sound it.”

“I thought you were Neal,” Emma admitted as she slumped onto her bed. “I was just telling my parents what had happened when the phone rang. I didn’t bother to look at the caller ID and I just assumed.”

“Sorry,” Regina offered even though she had nothing to be sorry for. “I didn’t mean to get your hopes up.”

“Don’t be silly,” Emma admonished. “It’s only been a day. I expect he needs time for the information to sink in. How has your afternoon been?”

Unknown to one another, the two women settled back on their respective beds and began to tell each other about their day. Regina’s had consisted of food shopping and tidying up her penthouse while Emma had spent as much time as possible with Henry and avoided checking her work emails. She knew Killian had been great about her taking time to be with her son but she also knew that if Henry being sick was going to become a feature of their lives for a while, she was going to have to somehow work her editing tasks into their daily routine.

When Emma emerged from her bedroom almost an hour later, she found her parents sitting in the newly tidy living room watching television. They both turned to her, however, and Mary turned off the screen as their daughter walked towards them.

“So,” Mary began, a glint in her eye. “Regina, huh?”

Emma’s cheeks flamed red. She had never been good at lying to her foster parents, a quality the two of them appreciated but one which had left Emma at a significant disadvantage during her teen years.

“Um, yeah, she was just calling to check on Henry,” Emma said.

“That woman is without a doubt the most diligent non-doctor I have ever met,” Mary deadpanned.
“Yup,” Emma said. “She’s likes to keep tabs on her former patients.”

“And their mothers,” David added.

Emma’s mouth fell open but she snapped it shut again, knowing it was useless to protest. It was clear both her mum and dad knew exactly what was going on between the two women.

“Don’t tell Henry.” Emma said after a moment’s silence. “We … we’re keeping things low-key for now. Until he’s better, at least.”

David and Mary nodded their agreement to this, both grinning broadly. Emma groaned. Both her parents had been way too invested in her love life since Lily had left. They didn’t care whether she found happiness with a man or woman. All that mattered to them was that Emma was appreciated, cared for and loved. She deserved that after everything she had been through.

“So, are you going to tell us what really happened in Bristol and Cardiff?” David asked.

“How did you -”

“We heard a female voice in the background on more than one occasion,” Mary said. “Next time you want to keep your romantic getaway a secret maybe tell Regina not to speak when you’re on the phone.”

“It wasn’t a romantic getaway,” Emma protested. “We really were going to find Neal. We did find him, actually. There was nothing going on between us.”

“Before,” Mary prompted.

Emma couldn’t help but smirk slightly. “Yeah,” she conceded. “Perhaps the nature of the trip changed slightly but the purpose of it didn’t. She still helped me find Neal even if she was no longer doing it in the capacity of Henry’s former doctor or even just a friend. I’m not sure I could have done it without her, to be honest.”

David and Mary beamed and Emma smiled too. She hadn’t felt like this for a very, very long time. So what if her parents knew? She and Regina weren’t doing anything wrong and so long as their relationship was kept from Henry for the time being, she didn’t see what harm it could do to finally feel something again, to be attracted to another person, to want another person. Because there was no use denying it any longer; Emma Swan wanted Regina Mills very badly.

The following afternoon Emma took Henry to the hospital for a check up after waving goodbye to her parents. Mary and David had promised to return the following weekend and made Emma swear she would call the moment she heard any news, either from the hospital or Neal. Although they didn’t use Neal’s name, not in front of Henry. They had decided it was best not to introduce the fact that Emma had tracked down her son’s birth father just yet; not until they knew whether Neal was going to be tested and, indeed, was a match.

Despite being back in hospital, Henry seemed fairly pleased to see Doctor West again and chatted happily away to ‘Lena’ as she checked him over.

“I hear you’re not eating much, Master Henry,” she said, arms folded and a mock scowl on her face.

“I’m not hungry,” Henry reasoned.
“I know, that’s how some of the medicine makes you feel,” Zelena reasoned. “But remember when I told you how important it is for you to make sure your body is strong so you can get better quickly? Food helps you do that.”

“Ok,” Henry sighed. “Mum, can we have lasagne for dinner?”

“Of course,” Emma said at once. She was bowing to her son’s every whim when it came to food at the moment. Anything he wanted, as long as he was eating, he got it.

“Lasagne, eh?” Zelena said. “Good choice. Miss Swan, can I speak to you for a moment?”

Emma nodded, handed the TV remote to Henry and then followed Zelena from the room.

“Well?” she asked as soon as they were outside.

“He’s not any worse and his fever is stable but it’s still elevated. The fact that he doesn’t feel hungry isn’t surprising but as I said to Henry, it is really important that he eats.”

“I’m trying,” Emma said at once.

“I know,” Zelena said. “I’d like to keep Henry in for a few hours just to run a couple of tests on this blood sample. It’s easier than you going home and coming back in and we may as well have him on an IV for that time, just to boost his antibodies and strengthen his body.”

“What are you testing for?” Emma asked.

Zelena shifted her weight to her other foot and looked sympathetically at Emma. “Cancer.”

“Cancer?” Emma asked, alarmed. “I thought you said he didn’t have cancer.”

“He didn’t,” Zelena said. “He may still not. But in many XLP cases, the body develops lymphoma. I’m going to prescribe him some immunosuppressive agents to buy us some time but the sooner he can undergo a bone marrow transplant the better. We’ve added him to the list but at the moment he’s pretty far down. Of course we don’t want him to have developed cancer but that would move him drastically higher up the list. His body would be significantly weaker however and would struggle to undergo chemotherapy whilst also battling glandular fever and XLP.”

“So … what can we do?” Emma asked, heart racing.

“We need to find him a donor,” Zelena said simply. “I know your parents tested negative and you can’t donate but is there anyone else whom you think might be willing to be tested? It’s a big ask but it is Henry’s best chance at receiving this treatment before his body weakens any more.”

“I found his father,” Emma admitted. “I told him. I’m waiting for him to contact me. He … well, he didn’t actually know about Henry.”

Zelena nodded her understanding. “Well, if you have anyone else who would be happy to have the test, blood relative or not, contact the hospital and ask for Belle. She’ll be able to perform the test and notify you of the results.”

Emma nodded mutely. “Anything else?” she asked, needing to return to her son.

“No,” Zelena said. “I’ll be back at about six with the results.”

Emma returned to the room and found Henry asleep. She hadn’t wanted to admit it to herself but his depleted energy levels were scary. She sat down beside him, muted the television, and curled
her fingers around his small hand.

Cancer. Even the word was terrifying. The thought of her little boy’s body being attacked by the disease was unimaginable to her. And yet, according to Zelena, it might already be happening. She had tried not to read up on XLP online but it had been impossible. The facts and figures and endless medical terms had both baffled and scared her.

Perhaps she should talk to Regina, she mused. At least the brunette would be able to explain everything. She was working in A and E at that very moment, Emma knew. Regina had mentioned the previous evening that she was on a seven to seven shift for the rest of the week. She wondered whether the doctor might visit Henry. But then she realised they’d probably be gone by the time Regina clocked off and she didn’t even know where the little family were. Emma could text her, she supposed, but she didn’t want to seem needy. The arrival of Belle broke Emma’s reverie.

“Hey, how’s our little man doing today?” Belle asked as she entered the room with a small tray.

“Oh,” Emma said. “He just fell asleep.”

“I could try and attach the IV without waking him but if he jerks away he could hurt himself,” Belle said, getting out everything she needed and hanging up the clear bag from the hook beside Henry’s bed.

“It’s ok,” Emma said, standing up and leaning over her son. “Henry, sweetie. Can you wake up and say hi to Nurse Belle?”

His eyes blinked open slowly, reminding Emma how similar her son’s orbs were to his fathers. She pushed thoughts of Neal from her mind and instead smiled down at the confused boy.

“Where am I?” he asked, frowning up at his mother.

“The hospital, remember?” Emma said. “We came in to see Doctor Zelena and now Nurse Belle is here to give you some more of that liquid that makes you stronger.”

“Hi Belle,” Henry said, catching sight of the nurse beside his bed.

Belle said hello back and set to work attaching the needle to the pale skin of Henry’s hand. The old marks where previous IVs had been attached were still visible. The fact that Henry didn’t flinch pained both women. No child should become used to this type of medical treatment. With the drip attached, Belle sat with the two of them for a while before leaving to continue her rounds. Within five minutes, Henry was asleep again.

Emma was replying to a work email on her phone when there was knock at the door. She glanced at the clock and saw it was after seven. She had been expecting Doctor West to return with the results over an hour ago and hadn’t noticed how late it was. Putting her phone away and with a glance at Henry to check he was still asleep, Emma crossed the room to open the door.

“Regina?”

“Hi,” the brunette said, a shy smile on her face.

She was dressed in jeans and what looked like a cashmere sweater, coat thrown over her arm. She had clearly just finished her shift and come to check in on the family before leaving for the night.

“Hey,” Emma said, smiling back. “Come in. Henry’s sleeping though so be quiet.”
Regina nodded and stepped into the room, closing the door behind her. Before she had turned back towards the blonde, Emma’s arms were wrapped tightly around her, the angle awkward and unnatural but neither cared. She shifted in the koala-like grip until they were pressed front to front and hugged Emma back, needing to feel the blonde just as much as it appeared the younger woman needed her. They broke apart only reluctantly.

“How are you holding up?” Regina asked.

“Zelena told you?”

“Yeah, I saw her in the staff room this afternoon. She had just dropped off the blood sample with the lab. Are you ok?”

Emma shrugged. “Not really but there’s no point worrying yet, is there? I was expecting Zelena back by now, though. Do you know why she’s late?”

“There was an emergency in the ICU,” Regina said. “She’ll be on her way soon, I suspect.” She glanced towards Henry’s bed where the boy was sleeping peacefully, the remnants of an IV bag beside him.

“How’s he been eating?”

“Not great,” Emma admitted. “But I’m trying. He requested lasagne tonight but he refuses to eat the one they serve in the canteen here, so I’ll come something when we get home.”

“Lasagne?”

“Yeah, why?” Emma asked.

“It just so happens that is the one dish my mother taught me to cook and, if I do say so myself, I’m rather good at it. If you want, I could …” She trailed off, not wanting to push.

“You want to cook for me?” Emma grinned.

“For Henry,” Regina amended. “But yes, I suppose you can have some too.”

Emma chuckled and, glancing once more at her son to check he was still asleep, leaned in to kiss Regina softly. Just as they broke apart, there was another knock at the door.

This time it was Zelena and although she raised her eyebrows when she noted Regina’s presence, she didn’t say anything. She suspected her friend felt something for the young mother but due to their hectic work schedules, the two of them hadn’t managed to had a proper catch up in weeks. From the way Emma’s cheeks were a little flushed, however, she thought one might be rather overdue.

“The tests are negative,” Zelena said. “There’s no cancerous cells yet.”

“Yet?” Emma asked.

“It’s only a matter of time, to be honest,” Zelena said. “I’ll need you to keep a very close eye on him over the coming weeks and bring him in if you notice any significant changes. Lots of healthy food, fruit and veg, lots of water, lots of sleep.”

“The latter shouldn’t be a problem,” Emma remarked, nodding to Henry who was still sleeping soundly.
“And get as many people as you can to sign up to be tested,” Zelena continued. “The sooner we can begin the transplants the better. Let’s nip this in the bud, ok?”

Emma nodded mutely, wondering how she could begin to ask her friends to be tested for their suitability for a bone marrow transplant. It didn’t matter, she realised. She had to ask; for Henry. Zelena detached the IV paraphernalia and handed Emma a bottle of pills with the instructions to give one to Henry every eight hours with food. And then she was gone, hurrying back to the ICU to check on her critical patient. Emma said a silent prayer that Henry wouldn’t be a child Zelena was rushing off to treat any time soon.

“So, lasagne?” Regina asked as Emma packed up her bag and Henry’s possessions.

“You wouldn’t mind?” Emma said. “I don’t really have the energy to cook tonight.”

“I’d be delighted,” Regina said. “I’ll pick up the ingredients on the way and then meet you at yours?”

Emma nodded her agreement and roused Henry gently. The boy barely woke as his mother lifted him into her arms, trying not to think about how light he had become. Regina held open the door and then followed Emma down the corridor.

“Um, where is yours?” Regina asked as she reached the car park, realising she had never been to Emma’s house.

The blonde gave her the postcode which she typed into Waze and quickly calculated which supermarket was closest to the proposed route. Promising to see Emma and Henry in no longer than half an hour, she hurried off to her car with a quick squeeze of Emma’s hand.

Henry fell asleep in the car on the way back home but perked up a bit when Emma woke him at their apartment and informed him Regina was coming over to make some lasagne. He even insisted on helping Emma tidy the cluttered sitting room as they waited for the brunette to arrive. He lost interest fairly quickly however and settled on the sofa while Emma rushed around trying to make her house presentable to the woman she was dating. Just as she was shoving a load of laundry into the washing machine, her phone rang.

“I’m outside,” Regina said.

“I’ll come down,” Emma said. “Henry, wait here, ok?”

She chucked her phone into the mess of cushions on the sofa and dashed out of the apartment, thundered down the stairs and swung around the end of the bannister. She grinned at Regina who was on the other side of the glass door and unlatched it quickly.

“Hi,” Emma said, suddenly shy about the dingy hallway with its worn carpet and flickering overhead light. Regina had, on more than one occasion, referred to her own place as a penthouse.

“Hi,” Regina said, pecking Emma on the lips, oblivious to the blonde’s embarrassment. “I got everything.”

“Come on up,” Emma said, eager to lead the way into her apartment which she considered to be far nicer than the communal entrance.

The door to the apartment was wide open and Emma was relieved to see Henry had not moved from the sofa in the thirty seconds she had been gone. Regina followed her inside and she closed the door behind the pair of them.
“Hello Henry,” Regina said. “How are you feeling?”

“Have you come to cook dinner?” Henry asked, ignoring the question.

“Is that ok with you?” she asked.

He nodded enthusiastically. “Lasagne?”

“You bet,” Regina grinned. “And a nice healthy salad to go with it. I know Doctor Lena wants you to be eating good foods, right?”

“Right,” Henry wrinkled his nose.

“So how about some fresh orange juice while you wait?” she said, pulling a small bottle from her bag. She had checked with Emma about giving the boy the drink before they entered and the blonde had agreed. He took it eagerly and thanked the brunette, turning his attention to opening the bottle and then drinking greedily.

“Right, kid, we’ll be in the kitchen,” Emma said. “If you need anything, just call us, ok?”

She showed Regina into the small but practical kitchen and the two of them unpacked the shopping. Emma grinned at the sight of the wine Regina had bought along with several bars of chocolate she suspected were not going to be eaten in sight of Henry. They looked far to posh for him. Plus, she didn’t think he’d like chilli in his chocolate.

“I usually put red pepper flakes in the lasagne too,” Regina said as she saw Emma admiring the chocolate. “But I thought I’d give that a miss for Henry.”

“Good idea,” Emma said. “Can I help?”

“You can get me a pan and some olive oil,” Regina said as she set about chopping up an onion with equipment she had already located. “And you can keep me company.”

“Done,” Emma said, getting the items then hopping up onto the kitchen counter and beginning to tell Regina about the time she had worked in a local pub kitchen and the head chef had sliced off the tip of his finger, both women oblivious to the domesticity of their situation once again.

Buried beneath a cushion in the other room, Emma’s phone illuminated once more but Henry was already asleep and the muffled vibrations didn’t wake him nor carry to the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: ok, now there’s no prizes for guessing who’s calling.
Twenty minutes later Emma watched as Regina carefully completed the final lasagne layer with a flourish before turning to the pile of grated cheese Emma had just finished preparing and sprinkling the top generously with the final ingredient. She then slid the dish into the oven and turned back to the blonde with a smile.

“Done,” she said, washing her hands quickly.

“You’re awesome,” Emma said as she slid down from the counter where she had been sat watching Regina prepare their meal. “Have I thanked you yet for doing this for Henry?”

“You have,” Regina nodded. “But you can thank me again if you want.”

Emma smirked at the teasing tone and stepped forward, peering past Regina to check Henry wasn’t about to appear in the kitchen. He wasn’t, so she ducked down to place a quick kiss on the brunette’s lips. Regina’s hands landed on her waist, tugging her closer and Emma found herself unable to refuse the silent request for more. She knew they needed to be careful. She knew her sick son was sitting next door and that he couldn’t find out about their budding relationship just yet. But the feel of Regina’s lips against hers was simply too delectable.

A knock at the apartment door a few minutes later made both women spring apart. Emma frowned slightly before moving past Regina and heading out into the living room, wiping the faint traces of Regina’s lipstick from her mouth as she went. Henry was looking curiously at the door from his place on the sofa but had made no move to answer the knock. Emma had told him never to open the door without her and she was pleased to see the lesson had stuck.

“Ruby, hey,” Emma said as she opened the door to find her best friend standing on the threshold, grinning and holding a bottle of wine.

“Hi,” the redhead said, giving Emma a quick hug before moving further into the apartment. “Hey Henry, how are you doing?”

“Hi Ruby,” Henry waved. “We’re having lasagne for dinner.”

“Nice,” Ruby said, glancing back at Emma who had shut the door and moved towards the sofa where Ruby had sat down beside Henry. “Room for one more?”

“Um, actually,” Emma began.

“Doctor Gina is cooking it,” Henry piped up before Emma could admit the presence of their guest.

“Doctor Gina,” Ruby said, a confused look on her face as she tried to place the name. “Regina? The super hot doctor from -. Oh, um, hi Regina.”
Emma whipped her head around to see the brunette standing in the doorway of the kitchen, arms folded and an amused look on her face as she surveyed the scene before her. She had clearly overheard Ruby’s comment.

“Nice to see you again, Ruby,” Regina said.

Ruby’s cheeks burned red and she looked back to Emma who was sheepishly hovering between both women, unsure quite what to do and how to explain Regina’s presence to her friend in front of Henry.

“Regina offered to cook lasagne for Henry,” Emma explained weakly. “Um, would you like to join us?”

“Sure,” Ruby said, looking curiously from her friend to the beautiful woman now making her way into the living room. “If that’s ok?”

“I’ve made plenty of food,” Regina said, coming to stand beside Emma.

“How about Ruby, Regina and I all go and check for you?” Emma said, leading the way out of the living room with both women obediently following along behind her.

As soon as the door was closed behind them, Ruby launched into an explosion of questions, all of which Emma expected and none of which she really felt like answering. After all she hadn’t even spoken to Regina about what was going on between them so she really didn’t need to answer her friend’s probing questions as to the nature of their relationship. She eventually held up a hand to silence the redhead. Ruby shut her mouth obediently before crossing to the counter and pouring herself a glass of wine from the remainder of the bottle which Regina had opened earlier.

“Fine,” she said after she’d taken a long sip. “Explain.”

Emma looked sideways Regina who nodded slightly. Keeping the details vague, Emma admitted that Regina had accompanied her on their road trip to Bristol and then Cardiff and that the two of them had discovered their attraction to one another along the way resulting in them beginning a tentative relationship.

“But Henry doesn’t know,” Emma finished. “And he can’t know.”

“He already knows,” Ruby scoffed. “He’s not stupid. I mean, he saw the chemistry between you two at the hospital before even me and Billy. Before you guys did,” she added.

“Well, perhaps,” Emma said. “But we’re not announcing anything officially until he’s better. We both want Henry to focus on getting well, not on my love life.”

Ruby laughed. “Yeah right. He’ll pick up on whatever’s going on between you two after five minutes in your company. This room practically smells of pheromones.”

“Shut up,” Emma said. “You can’t smell pheromones. You’re not a wolf.”

“Nope, I’m not, but you’re way too fun to tease so I’m going to continue. Before we get back to that, tell me all about your road trip. You can leave all the sexy details until later,” she said with a wink at Regina, “and then I want to really hear everything. For now, though, did you find Neal?”
“We did,” Emma nodded. She then told Ruby everything about tracking down Henry’s biological father and how Neal had taken the news that he had a son and that Henry needed a bone marrow transplant and that Neal was their best chance for a match. By the time she had finished the oven timer had pinged and Regina had begun to serve up their meals, an extra plate added to the stack for Ruby. “But again, we haven’t told Henry about Neal yet. We don’t want to say anything until we know whether he’s a match and is willing to donate.”

“Of course he’ll donate,” Ruby scoffed. “What sort of father would he be if he didn’t?”

“I haven’t exactly offered him the opportunity to be a father in the past,” Emma reasoned. “He doesn’t even know Henry.”

“It’s his son,” Ruby said simply. “Of course he’ll help.”

“I haven’t heard from him yet,” Emma said sadly.

“You will,” Regina said just as she added the last salad serving to the plate. “He’ll call soon, I’m sure of it.”

Emma smiled sadly at Regina and nodded. She hoped the brunette was right but she also wished she didn’t have to wait to find out. The suspense was killing her and, in a far more literal way, it was also killing Henry. She pushed that thought from her mind and helped Regina carry the food through to the living room.

They ate their dinner at the small dining table in the corner of the room. Although Emma had been allowing Henry to eat on the sofa in front of the TV recently, she decided Regina’s efforts with the lasagne deserved a proper sit down meal. Henry didn’t even complain as he climbed up into his seat and even managed to eat half of his portion and drink the rest of his juice before he laid down his fork. At Emma’s gentle persuasion, he nibbled a little more at the lettuce but soon after that he asked permission to leave the table and slid from his chair to return to the sofa. Regina, Ruby and Emma watched as he pulled his little body onto the sofa and settled once more in the mound of cushions.

“He looks weaker,” Ruby said without thinking.

“I know,” Emma said, eyes suddenly prickling with tears.

Regina reached across the table and gripped Emma’s hand, stroking the skin softly with the pad of her thumb. “He ate well just now,” she reminded the desperate mother. “The tests today all came back negative and he’s on the list for bone marrow already. You won’t have to wait much longer, I’m sure of it.”

“What tests?” Ruby asked.

“Cancer,” Emma replied thickly. “Apparently lots of kids with XLP develop it. Something to do with their immune systems being compromised.”


Emma shook her head. “I haven’t told him. He doesn’t need to know yet, not if the tests keep coming back negative. We just have to hope Neal or some other donor comes through and we can get him the transplant quickly, before cancer has time to develop.”

“Other donors?” Ruby asked.
“There’s a national waiting list for bone marrow,” Regina explained. “Members of the public can donate and the specimens are given to patients who most need it. Henry’s a little way down that list at the moment but in the event of a non-familial match, many people successfully receive a donation from strangers.”


“Um, yes, in theory,” Regina said. “Do you know your blood group?”


“Really?” Emma asked, tears now spilling down her cheeks. “You’d really do that for Henry?”

“I’d do anything for that kid,” Ruby said sincerely. She had known Henry for five years, had watched him grow up, helped Emma raise him in some ways. She knew Emma was the boy’s mother but she loved Henry like he was her own son. “Why didn’t you ask us to do this before?”

“I was going to,” Emma admitted. “I just didn’t know how to approach the subject.”

“It’s Henry’s life we’re talking about here,” Ruby said firmly. “There’s no need to take a subtle approach. You should be asking everyone. What about Killian? Couldn’t he get tested too? The more people the better, right?”

“He’s in New York for some business trip to discuss a new contract with a publishing house over there,” Emma said. “In fact I’m supposed to go into the office tomorrow to meet with a couple of authors. Are you free to -?”

“I’ll watch Henry,” Ruby said before the question was answered. “Anything you need, Em, just ask.”

“Thanks,” Emma said, grasping Ruby’s hand in her free one and interlacing her fingers with Regina’s in the other. “Both of you, thank you so much. I don’t know what I would do without -”

“Mum! Your phone is ringing,” Henry piped up from the couch.

Emma glanced between the two women before she jumped to her feet and rushed towards her son who was holding the illuminated mobile. She didn’t recognise the number and her heart skipped a beat as she answered.

“Hello?”

There was a slight pause, hesitant, uncertain, before a voice answered the greeting.

“Hey, is that Emma?”

It was happening, Emma thought to herself. This was the conversation which could change Henry’s future. And would change their lives. “Yes.”

“It’s Neal.”

Emma gripped onto the edge of the sofa to steady herself. She had known already who it was but hearing him say his name had made it all suddenly very real. At Emma’s reaction Regina instinctively knew who was calling and moved to the young woman’s side. With an arm around Emma’s waist she steered the blonde into the kitchen so they could talk in private without Henry overhearing. When the door was shut once more, Emma replied.
“Hi, thanks for calling me.”

“Yeah,” Neal said. “Sorry it took so long.”

“That’s ok,” Emma said as she hopped up onto the counter again, her legs feeling too weak to hold her up. “It was a lot to take in.”

“You could say that,” Neal nodded. “Finding out you have a six year old kid is one thing. Finding out he’s dying and needs your help is another.”

“I know,” Emma said. “And for what it’s worth, I’m sorry you had to find out that way.”

“Would you have tracked me down if he hadn’t been sick?”

Emma faltered. Would she ever have gone looking for Neal? Would she ever have had the desire to find Henry’s father? Would Henry eventually want to know where he came from and asked Emma to help him find Neal?

“I don’t know,” she admitted in the end. “Maybe, if Henry had wanted to know you when he was older we might have.”

“What does he know about me?” Neal asked.

“As much as I knew before this weekend,” Emma said. “Your name, the fact that you’re from Bristol. I couldn’t really tell him anything else, could I?”

“You didn’t make anything up?”

“I don’t lie to Henry,” Emma said simply.

“Right,” Neal said. He didn’t know the first thing about parenting but he’d assumed Emma would have concocted a fantastical story for their son in his absence. Apparently not. “So, um, I’ve been thinking.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Neal nodded. “And I’m going to get tested. To see if I’m a match for Henry.”

“Really?” Emma asked, her heart lifting immediately and she gave Regina the thumbs up. The brunette, who was waiting by the door, smiled brilliantly back at her.

“I want to meet Henry.”

Regina’s ears pricked at the word. Out of context she couldn’t work out if Neal was telling Emma he had a medical condition or that there were strings attached to him getting tested. She wasn’t sure which one she wanted him to be referring to.

“I want to meet Henry.”

Emma’s throat went dry. She had been expecting this, she supposed. It was natural for Neal to want to meet his son whom he hadn’t even known existed if he was going to be getting tested and potentially involved in his future medical procedures. It was one of the reasons she had been debating whether to find Neal in the first place. She knew the man was technically Henry’s father but she barely knew Neal. She didn’t trust him not to come into their lives and rock their perfect
little family. She didn’t trust him to be there for Henry the way a father was supposed to be. She didn’t trust him not to hurt Henry, to abandon him the way Lily had.

“I understand,” Emma said slowly. “I know you have a right to meet your son but -”

“I do have rights,” Neal interrupted. “You can’t keep me from him. I never signed away my parental rights.”

Someone’s been googling, Emma thought to herself. “No, you didn’t,” Emma said. “But you’re also not on the birth certificate. I didn’t know your name so I … well, he doesn’t legally have a father.”

There was silence. Emma bit her lip, waiting for Neal to answer. Regina hovered awkwardly by the door. She felt like she was overhearing a private conversation and wondered whether she should have stayed in the living room with Ruby. Emma hadn’t explicitly invited her to be present at the moment she heard Neal’s decision. It was too late now, she decided, as she leaned back against the door and waited for the conversation to end.

“So you won’t let me see him?” Neal asked, his voice softer than before.

“I didn’t say that,” Emma replied. “I have no intention of keeping Henry from you, Neal. But if we do this, it’s on my terms, ok? Henry is sick right now and I don’t want to overwhelm him. And frankly, you are going to have to prove to me that I can trust you to be a good influence on our son, to be someone he and I can rely on, not someone who just flits in and out of his life whenever you feel like it. If you want to do this, if you want to be introduced to Henry as his father, that’s a big commitment you’re making to him and one that you’ll have to maintain for the rest of your life.”

Another long pause. It seemed to Emma that Neal hadn’t fully thought through what he had asked of her until that moment. That he hadn’t understood the magnitude of responsibility which came with the term ‘father’. Perhaps, she mused, it would be too much for him. Perhaps he’d back off and change his mind about meeting Henry. Maybe he’d even change his mind about the transplant. Her blood ran cold at the thought.

“If I’m a match,” Neal said eventually. “If I can donate to him, then I want to meet him, ok?”

Emma took a deep breath. She had to agree. She had to make this deal because it might well save Henry’s life.

“Ok.”
A/N: Delayed again, I’m sorry! But here, have 4,000 words of SwanQueen with a sprinkling of Ruby and Zelena for good measure. Reviews are love …

Emma hung up the phone and dropped it onto the counter beside her. Regina hesitated, unsure quite what to say. She had got the gist of the conversation, had guessed Emma had permitted Neal to meet their son. Her gut twisted in a way she knew it had no right to do. Henry was, after all, nothing to do with her. She didn’t have any responsibility towards him, hadn’t known him long enough to feel protective, of Henry or Emma. And yet …

“He wants to meet Henry if he’s a match.”

“Only if he’s a match?” Regina frowned.

Emma shrugged. Should she feel hurt that Neal only wanted to meet Henry if he was a match for the bone marrow transplant? Did that mean he didn’t want to know his son if he wasn’t a compatible donor? Should she be angry that her son’s father only was only offering to donate if he could meet his son? What was she supposed to feel about any of this?

“Yeah,” Emma said. “Which is …” She trailed off, still unable to understand exactly how the conditional offer made her feel.

“Weird,” Regina said, unable to stop herself.

“Is it?” Emma asked.

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “I don’t know what the right response is to finding out you have a son but only wanting to meet him if you’re a medical match and can save his life and only agreeing to do exactly that if you can meet him is weird.”

“I guess,” Emma replied. “But I didn’t have a choice in the matter, did I?”

“No,” Regina admitted. “Not if he can save Henry’s life.”

Emma slid off the counter and wrapped her arms around Regina, burying her head in the soft skin of the brunette’s neck, needing to feel in some way comforted, supported, grounded. The doctor made her feel all those things, she had realised. Ruby barging into the kitchen broke the embrace a few seconds later, however.

“Well?” she asked impatiently. “What did he say?” She too had realised that Neal must have been the person on the other end of the phone call and had been itching to follow the other two women into the kitchen. Leaving Henry in front of the television, she had eventually done exactly that.

“He’s going to get tested,” Emma began.

“Great!”
“But if he’s a match he wants to meet Henry,” she finished.

“What? No!”

Emma shrugged. “I agreed.”

“Why?” Ruby frowned.

“Because he might be able to save Henry’s life,” Emma reasoned.

“Yeah but he might also fuck up your family, Emma,” Ruby reasoned. “You don’t need him, nor does Henry. Why would you allow him to put a condition on saving Henry’s life anyway? Shouldn’t he do it regardless?”

“That’s what I think,” Regina piped up.

“Hey,” Emma said, holding her hands up defensively. “What else could I do? I know Neal should want to help Henry whether he meets him or not but let’s not forget the reason he never has met his son is because of me. He has a right to meet him now though, doesn’t he? To get to know Henry just a little bit. He doesn’t strike me as the domesticated type so I hardly think he’s going to go for joint custody or anything. But maybe Henry having a father in his life would be a good thing. I don’t think it will hurt and if it means he gets the bone marrow he needs, then I’m not going to say no.”

Ending her little speech, Emma walked from the kitchen, leaving Regina and Ruby to look guiltily at one another. They hadn’t meant to attack Emma in any way, but both women disliked the way in which Neal had only expressed interest in meeting Henry if he was a match and would only donate his life-saving bone marrow on the condition that he would be permitted to meet his son. Protective both of Emma and Henry, the idea of an unknown playboy entering their lives was highly displeasing.

“Should we -”

“Let’s leave her to cool off for a bit,” Ruby said as Regina looked longingly after the blonde. “She probably just needs some time with Henry. I mean, it’s not like she actually wants Neal to come into their lives, is it?”

“I don’t think so,” Regina mused. “But what if Henry wants to get to know his dad?”

Ruby shrugged. “I guess that would be natural. We’ll just have to make sure Neal doesn’t let him down.”

“We?”

“Assuming you won’t be letting Emma down, yes,” Ruby said, eyes narrowed slightly. “I mean, you’re dating Emma, right? You’re planning to be with her moving forward? If that’s the plan, you’re going to be a part of their life when Neal enters it just as much as I am.”

“I hope so,” Regina replied. “But we both want to take things slowly until Henry is better. I don’t want Emma pressurised by a new relationship when she should be focusing on her son.”

“Regardless, you want to be there for Emma, correct?”

“Both Emma and Henry, yes,” Regina nodded.
“Then we’ll both be there for whatever happens with Neal,” Ruby said. “It’s Emma’s decision but she’s not going to have to go through this alone. We don’t even know this guy. He might be an awesome father but let’s face it, that’s doubtful. And introducing Henry to his dad is going to be a big thing; she’ll need support.”

“And if he isn’t a match, she’ll probably need even more,” Regina said, without thinking.

Ruby winced. She hadn’t thought about that. She had just been assuming Neal would indeed be a compatible donor for Henry and that the biggest problem the little family would soon have in the appearance of a father for the small boy. She hadn’t thought about the fact that if Neal wasn’t a match, Henry was going need to find another donor.

“What are the chances of me or Billy being a match?” Ruby asked, remembering her promise to Emma that she and her boyfriend would go and get tested to see if they could donate bone marrow to Henry.

“Henry’s blood group is O which happens to be the most compatible blood group with everyone else.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

“In theory, but the strange thing about O negative blood is that while every other person in the world can receive O negative blood, these people themselves can only receive O negative,” Regina explained.

“What?” Ruby frowned.

“Henry could donate blood to you or me or Emma or even Neal. But he has to receive O negative. The problem with that, therefore, is that O negative blood is in a much higher demand than all other blood groups because it can be used for anyone at any time. The NHS is always calling for more O negative people to donate because their blood is so valuable. And that also means the list for people waiting to receive O negative blood is longer.”

“And what are the chances I have O negative blood?” Ruby asked. “I mean, what percentage of the population has that blood group.”

“Seven per cent.”

Ruby let out a long, low breath. “Fuck.”

Regina nodded her agreement to the sentiment. “Yes, so regardless of how you or I feel about Neal, at the moment he really is Henry’s best chance of survival and if that means he’s going to meet Henry, maybe that’s a small price to pay.”

“For Henry’s life?”

Regina grimaced. “We need to stay positive. For Emma and Henry. We don’t need to be thinking like that, ok? Not yet; we still have time.”

“How much time?” Ruby asked.

Regina didn’t answer. Instead, she grabbed the bottle of wine which was sitting on the counter and left the kitchen, knowing she herself needed a drink and suspecting Emma did too.
Long after Henry was tucked up in bed, after Ruby had returned to her apartment on the opposite side of the hallway, Regina reluctantly untangled herself from Emma’s arms in which she had been lying on the couch. The blonde pouted and tried to pull Regina back down but the doctor gently insisted that she needed to leave.

“You could stay over,” Emma suggested.

“I thought you didn’t want Henry to find out about us,” Regina reminded her.

“Oh, yeah.” Emma said. “I guess he might cotton on to something if you were still here in the morning.”

“Ruby thinks he knows already,” Regina pointed out as she stood and gathered her coat and bag.

“He hasn’t said anything,” Emma shrugged. “But if he does ask I won’t lie to him. Is that ok?”

“Of course, he’s your son. You can tell him whatever you think is appropriate.”

“So … if I was to tell him something, what would I say, exactly?”

Regina smirked, flicking out her hair from beneath her coat collar. “Are you asking me to define our relationship, Miss Swan?”

Emma swallowed thickly. Hearing her surname coming from Regina’s lips in that sultry tone did something to her stomach. She stood up and made her way towards the brunette, looping her arms around her waist and pulling their bodies together.

“Perhaps,” the blonde nodded. “I mean … what do you think about what’s going on between us?”

“I’m excited to be honest,” Regina began, her own arms now slung around Emma’s neck, fingers tangled in the long blonde hair. “But I know we need to take things slowly, for Henry’s sake. I really like spending time with you, though. And I want to continue to do so. Can we be … dating?”

Emma’s face split into a wide smile and she leaned down to place a soft kiss to the plump lips before her. “We can most certainly be dating.”

“Great,” Regina grinned back, rocking onto her tip toes to quickly kiss Emma again. “And I believe it’s your turn to plan a date, by the way. Show me what creative activity you can come up with.”

“Challenge accepted,” Emma said. “But the timing is going to depend on Henry.”

“Of course,” Regina said. “I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

Leading Regina over to the door, Emma was reluctant to let the brunette go but she also knew it would be unwise for Henry to wake up and discover the doctor in their apartment. While they had agreed not to lie to the boy, keeping the relationship quiet for the time being still seemed like a sensible approach in light of his illness. Promising to call Regina as soon as Neal got his results but knowing the two of them would be speaking far sooner than that anyway, Emma waved goodbye to the brunette returned to her apartment.

Checking on Henry before she too went to bed, she winced at the feel of his hot forehead. Regina had reassured her it was only the glandular fever and that nothing more had developed but she still hated seeing the beads of sweat and his evident discomfort as his body battled against his illness.
“We’re going to make you better, kiddo,” Emma said, more to herself than her sleeping son as she pressed her lips lightly to his forehead and crept quietly from the dark room.

Regina had just sat down to her lunch in the canteen when Zelena dropped into the chair opposite her. Not yet changed into her scrubs, Zelena had spotted Regina on her way into the hospital and decided she couldn’t wait any longer to find out what was going on between her best friend and Emma Swan.

“So, tell me everything,” Zelena said, reaching over and snagging a carrot stick from Regina’s plate.

“That would take quite some time,” Regina remarked. “There is a lot of knowledge in this world. Where would you like me to start?”

“How about with you and Emma Swan?”

Regina choked on a forkful of lettuce and banged herself in the chest as her eyes watered. Reaching for her drink, she gulped down some apple juice as she tried to catch her breath.

“Excuse me?” she managed eventually, meeting Zelena’s amused gaze.

“You heard me,” the redhead grinned. “And from that reaction, I’d say my suspicions have been confirmed. Tell me as much as you can now and then we’re meeting up as soon as our shifts match up and you’re spilling every single bean.”

Regina grimaced. There was no way out of this. Zelena knew her too well. And anyway, it wasn’t exactly like the two of them were hiding their relationship specifically from anyone but Henry. Ruby and Billy knew and so did Emma’s parents, so the blonde had informed her. What difference would Zelena make?

“Ok, fine, we’re dating,” she admitted.

“I knew it!” Zelena squealed. “Since when?”

“Um, Saturday, I suppose.”

“It’s Wednesday,” Zelena said slowly.

“It is,” Regina nodded.

“So you’ve only been together four days?”

“Are you disappointed?” Regina asked.

“Surprised, I suppose,” Zelena replied. “And proud of myself for finding out so soon.”

“Surprised in what way?”

“In the ‘I know you and I know she’s your type’ way. How come it took you so long to make a move?”

“Actually, she made the first move,” Regina replied. “And I wasn’t ever planning on trying to start anything between us. I met her because of Henry. It seemed unethical somehow.”

“But now you’re over the ethics?”
“Now you’re Henry’s doctor so technically I’m not doing anything wrong,” Regina reasoned. “But … can you maybe keep this quiet anyway? We’re not exactly going around broadcasting it. Henry doesn’t know either so when you see them again, please don’t say anything he might pick up on.”

“Would I do that?” Zelena asked, feigning offence. Regina just looked pointedly at her friend and returned to her abandoned lunch. “Fine, I’ll keep my mouth shut but there really is no need. You’re right; the hospital can’t have a problem with the two of you dating now you’re not treating Henry. So how did it happen? What was the first move your charming Emma Swan made?”

Regina smirked. “A lady never kisses and tells.”

“Do ladies fuck and tell?”

Regina scowled at her friend’s crass language and looked around, hoping no one from A & E was nearby to overhear. “We haven’t slept together yet,” she admitted. “At least, not in the way you’re thinking of. We’re taking it slow. We’re waiting.”

“For what?” Zelena frowned. “You’re both adults, you’re dating. Why wait?”

“Henry,” Regina said simply. “We want to see what there is between us before we get sex involved which will complicate matters and bring Henry into the equation. As soon as I stay at their place, he will find out we’re dating. We don’t want him to overly attached to me if Emma and I don’t work out. He’s been let down by one of Emma’s exes before and I don’t want that to happen again. Especially not now he’s so sick.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” Zelena said. “Belle told me two of Emma’s friends came in this morning to have their blood tested to see if they were a match for Henry.”

“And?”

Zelena shook her head. “One was O positive but that still wouldn’t work. What are the chances he’s the most inconvenient and yet most in demand blood type?”

“Seven per cent,” Regina shrugged, the figure constantly going around in her head. “Does Emma know about the results?”

“Her friends do,” Zelena said. “So I presume so. Does she have anyone else who could get tested?”

“Henry’s father is going to the hospital in Cardiff today, we think,” Regina replied. “He’s our best hope.”

“I’ll go and check the waiting list for bone marrow as soon as I clock in,” Zelena said. “Try and move him up. If we can get this transplant before any cancers develop he’s going to have a much better chance of survival.”

Regina swallowed thickly. “I know.”

Zelena noted the change in her friend’s voice and reached across the table, patting Regina’s hand. “You’ve grown rather fond of that little family, haven’t you?” she remarked. Regina nodded but said nothing, not trusting herself to keep her emotions in check. “We’ll find him a donor,” Zelena continued. “Don’t give up hope yet. Have you told Emma what the two of them face? I mean, have you spoken about it in any more detail than I have?”

“I didn’t think it was my place,” Regina shrugged. “You’re Henry’s doctor and we try not to allow all of our conversations to revolve around his illness. Why? Do you want me to give her the facts
“It might be an idea,” Zelena said. “Depending on how long we’re going to have to wait on these donors, I think Emma needs to be prepared. Do you think it would be better coming from you?”

Regina pulled a face. The thought of telling the blonde the harsh, bleak reality of the situation made her heart tremble. She really didn’t want to be the person Emma associated with her son’s illness, although she suspected it may already be too late for that.

“How about we tell her together?” Zelena suggested when Regina didn’t answer. “I think they’ll be coming in on Friday for another check-up and an IV. You’re working, right?” Regina nodded. “Ok then, after your shift ends, come up and find them and we can do it together. Set the facts on the table.”

Ruby was moping. Curled up on the edge of Emma’s sofa with a bottle of beer in her hand, she looked morosely at her friend who mirrored her position. As soon as the redhead had received the results of her blood test, she had headed to Emma’s apartment to take care of Henry while Emma went into work. The day had mostly consisted of watching films with Henry and feeding him small snacks and the occasional pill until his mother had returned. Once the boy was in bed that evening, Ruby had stayed at Emma’s, wanting to drown her sorrows with the woman she somehow felt she had let down.

“I thought I could have solved all your problems,” she sighed. “If I’d been a match there would have been no need for Neal. We could have just used my bone marrow and Henry would have got better and life would have gone back to normal.”

“I know,” Emma said. “It’s ok though.”

“It’s not,” Ruby huffed childishly. “Why did I have to be O positive? So close and yet so far. It’s just the universe taunting us, isn’t it.”

“Yes, Rubes,” Emma chuckled, despite the situation. “The universe is laughing at us by denying you the right to have a giant needle stuck in your leg.”

“I don’t care about that,” She said quickly. “You know I’d do anything for Henry.”

“I know you would,” Emma said. “And I really appreciate that. But there’s nothing we can do now we know you’re not a match. We’re just going to have to move on, ok?”

Ruby glowered and swigged some more beer. It wasn’t taking the edge off her disappointment, however, and she still felt like she had failed Emma and Henry somehow. She knew Billy felt bad too. They both loved Henry to pieces and the fact that they too were powerless to help was tantamount to torture.

“So, I guess we’re just waiting on Neal to come through,” Ruby sighed. She resented the man on principle even though she knew it wasn’t exactly his fault he hadn’t been in Henry’s life up until this point. Emma had filled her in on their brief encounter, however, and she thought he sounded like a bit of an idiot.

“Killian flies back in on Thursday,” Emma said. “He said he’d get tested as soon as he lands.”

She had been in the office all afternoon, and had spoken briefly to her boss and friend. He knew Henry was sick, of course, but when Emma admitted how desperate the two of them were, he promised to go directly from the airport to the hospital to have a blood test before he even returned
home. Emma had thanked him profusely but was still feeling doubtful. After all, seven per cent was a number far too small for any optimism.

“Well, I’ll be keeping my fingers crossed it’s Kill, not Neal,” Ruby said.

“I don’t care who it is as long as they can help Henry,” Emma shrugged.

Ruby nodded her head in agreement, thinking. “Um, has Regina been tested?”

“She’s not a match,” Emma said. “She told me before I’d even asked her. Actually, I’m not sure I would have asked, to be honest. I mean, I know she’s not technically his doctor but I can’t imagine the hospital would be happy with one of their doctors giving a patient bone marrow. She donates blood regularly through. But she’s AB; it’s incompatible.”

“Damn,” Ruby said. “Because that would have been kinda serendipitous.”

“It would have been intense,” Emma corrected Ruby. “I mean, things between us are already pretty intense. It’s been four days since our first kiss and already I can’t quite imagine what I’d do without her.”

“Because of Henry?”

“I thought it was that,” Emma admitted. “I thought I was drawn to her at first because I believed she could save my son. And she’s beautiful, of course. But the more time I spend with her, the more I realise it’s so much more than that. She’s amazing, Rubes. She’s funny and kind and caring and sweet and yes, she’s amazing with Henry. And the fact that she understands everything that’s going on with him and can support us both through it is a real plus but even without that, even if we had met at a different time, I still think I’d feel like this about her.”

“Like what?” Ruby smirked. She hadn’t seen her friend so animated, so unguarded and so earnest about anyone since Lily left. Even when things had been going great with Emma’s ex, Ruby didn’t think she had ever heard the blonde talking in such a way.

Emma had started to blush, realising what she had been saying and what it sounded like. She could tell Ruby was going to tease her about this in months to come, at least, if the relationship was still going, which she very much hoped it would be.

“I’m crazy about her, Ruby,” Emma admitted quietly. “I’ve never felt like this about anyone before.”

“Anyone?” Ruby asked, eyebrows raised. Despite how much she hated Lily for what she did to Emma, she also knew that the blonde had truly loved her former girlfriend.

“I’ve not felt like this,” Emma said. “Not so fast, not so … intense.”

Ruby grinned widely. “I’m so happy for you, Ems,” she said, reaching over and squeezing Emma’s hand. “You deserve this, you really do. Both you and Henry.”

“Which is why I can’t fuck this up,” Emma said, suddenly sobered. “I don’t think I could take that; being the person who brought someone else into Henry’s life, someone so amazing, only to mess up and have them leave me, leave us.”

“Regina’s not going anywhere,” Ruby said vehemently. “She’s just as besotted with you as you are with her.”
“You think so?”

“I know so,” Ruby replied. “You two were made for each other. Yeah, the timing isn’t great and yes your relationship is going to have to take a back seat to Henry’s illness at times but at least you’ve got each other now. At least Henry has her too. I know you’re keeping it quiet from him but I really don’t see what harm it would do if he found out. He loves Regina, Emma, and it might be less confusing for him to know the real reason why his former doctor is around at his house all the time. He’s a mature six year old, he’ll understand you two are dating. If you think this is going to be a long-term relationship, why not just tell him about you and Regina?”

“Where’s Gina?” came a small voice from the doorway to Henry’s bedroom as the boy himself shuffled out into the living room.

Just as Emma was about to answer, her phone rang; illuminated with the new contact details she had saved the previous evening. Neal Cassidy’s name flashed up on her screen.
A/N: I’m so sorry for the delay. I’ve been super busy at work and had to get ahead of my schedule as I’m off on holiday tomorrow (yes, with my laptop …) Anyway, the internet dropped which meant I couldn’t do any of my actual work so I decided to write for you darling peeps.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Um, hold that thought, kid,” Emma said as she swiped her phone screen. “Hello?”

“Hi, it’s me.”

Emma wasn’t sure how she felt about Henry’s father answering the phone like that. He’d only been a tangible part of their lives for a few days and already he was ‘me’? Ignoring the slight bristle she felt, she stood from the couch, signalling to Ruby to watch Henry and made her way into the kitchen.

“Yeah, hi,” Emma said after she had shut the door. “How are you?”

“I’m doing good,” Neal said. “I just got back from the hospital.”

“Rather late for a visit, isn’t it?” Emma mused. She had assumed Henry’s father hadn’t managed to get around to the trip and hadn’t been expecting a call from him that day.

“I picked up some last minute work as security for some sports event at the uni,” Neal explained. “Only knocked off an hour ago.”

“Oh, well then thanks for going to get tested,” Emma said, feeling bad about her assumption now it seemed Neal had gone straight from work.

“You said it was urgent,” came the simple reply.

“It is.”

“Well, it’s a good thing I’m a match them.”

Everything went silent. The traffic on the road outside faded into the distance, the hum of trains on the tracks ceased to exist. Even the drone of the refrigerator was eclipsed by the news. Neal was a match. Neal could donate to Henry. Neal could save Henry.

“You are?”

“O Negative, right?”

“Right,” Emma said, her voice thick with emotion.

“Then yep, I’m a match. Nurse said I’m fit and healthy too. No reason why I can’t donate as soon as you need me to. They checked over my records and I’m good to go whenever.”
“You’re really going to do this?” Emma asked. “You’re really going to help Henry?”

There was a long pause and then: “He’s my son too, Emma. Just because I didn’t know about him, doesn’t mean I’m going to let my flesh and blood die.”

Emma stifled a sob behind her hand. No one had yet vocalised the possibility that Henry would not survive his illness, not really. Not so bluntly. She had known, of course. She knew the statistics for survival both with and without the bone marrow transplant. But hearing Neal say those words had hit her like a freight train.

“Emma?”

She suddenly realised she hadn’t replied and sniffed several times, trying to catch her breath through her tears. “Yes, thank you. I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok,” Neal said. “Sick kids are tough.”

“Yeah,” Emma said. “Yeah, it’s hard.”

“Good job I’m able to help out then,” Neal said. “Do you know how soon we can do this transplant? The nurse filled me in on how the bone marrow extraction is done ahead of Henry getting the cells and I can’t say I’m looking forward to it but the sooner the better, right?”

“As soon as possible, I think,” Emma said, realising she didn’t know much about how Henry would need to be prepared for the transplant. “I’ll ask Regina and let you know when would be best for Henry.”

“Regina?” Neal asked. “Is she that brunette chick who came to Cardiff with you?”

Emma had always hated the word ‘chick’ and was completely unsurprised to hear Neal using the term. He might have just agreed to save their son’s life but his attitude towards women could never exactly be termed as chivalrous.

“Yes,” Emma said. “She’s his doctor.” She decided it was unnecessary to mention that Regina wasn’t Henry’s current doctor and wanted to avoid any awkward questions about the nature of their relationship. Although she doubted Neal would be anything other than turned on to hear the two of them were dating. He seemed like exactly the type to think lesbians were in the world for men like him to watch.

“Right, well, let me know and I’ll book some time off work. I suppose it would be easier if I come up to London?”

“I think so,” Emma nodded. There was a pause and then: “Neal, are you really going to do this? Are you really committed to what you’re saying. Because I can’t be let down, not when Henry’s life is at stake. If you’re not one hundred per cent sure about wanting to donate, please tell me now so I can find another donor.”

She could hear rustling on the far end of the phone and what sounded like keys in a door. She imagined Neal walking into a crummy student-like flat he shared with a few bouncer friends. And then she wondered why it was taking the man so long to reply. Had she put him off? Had she made him rethink his decision? Had she been to harsh and annoyed him? But then he spoke.

“I was only not in Henry’s life for the first six years because I didn’t know about him. Had you told me sooner, I would have been involved sooner. He’s my kid, Emma. Of course I want to help him get better. And I know I’ve got to prove that you can trust me and that I’ll be a good influence
on Henry and a good dad but I want to try to do just that. I want a chance to show you that I’m more than just this lad about town who chases skirt. Just because I’ve never been a dad before, doesn’t mean I’ll be a bad one.”

Another sob escaped Emma as she slid down the cupboard to sit heavily on the floor a wave of guilt flooding her body. “I’m sorry,” she gasped. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier, Neal. I should have looked for you. I should have gone to the bar as soon as I found out I was pregnant. I had no right to keep Henry from you, to keep our son from his father. And now, even after everything I’ve done, you’re still willing to help Henry. You deserved better, Neal. You deserved to know about Henry far soon and under better circumstances.”

“Shit, Emma, don’t cry,” Neal said, the awkwardness he was evidently feeling palpable down the phone. “It’s cool, really. I was a kid back then. Hell, I probably would have run a mile if you’d told me seven years ago. It’s probably for the best Henry didn’t know me when I was younger. I’m not saying I’m perfect now but at least I’ve got my head screwed on a little better. And I can support you a little, financially, I mean.”

“We don’t need your money, Neal,” Emma said. “That’s not what I’m after.”

“No, you’re after my bone marrow,” Neal said in a poor attempt at a joke.

Emma let out a watery chuckle. “That might have been why I tracked you down, yes,” she admitted. “But having been spurred into action by this illness, I think I’ve finally done something I have been subconsciously putting off for years. Every son needs his father.”

“And Henry has me,” Neal said. “I’m not saying I’m perfect and I reckon I’ll make some mistakes. But I want to try. I want to get to know my son.”

“I want that too,” Emma said. “I don’t think I’d realised how much until just now.”

They fell into an almost comfortable silence and Emma picked herself up off the floor and wiped her face on a tea towel.

“Look, I’ve got to go. Henry woke up just before you phoned,” Emma said. “But I’ll call you as soon as I’ve spoken to the hospital, is that ok?”

“Yeah,” Neal said. “Um, have you told Henry you met me at the weekend?”

“I was waiting until we knew if you were a match,” Emma admitted. “So I guess that would be what I’m about to do.”

Emma heard a sharp intake of breath and then a long exhale. “Ok,” Neal said slowly. “Thanks.”

“Thank you,” Emma said sincerely. “I’ll call you when I know what the doctors say.”

She hung up, dropped the phone to the kitchen counter and leaned her palms heavily on either side of it, bent over with her eyes closed. Had that just happened? Had Neal really agreed to save Henry? Had he really just cried down the phone at a one night stand and apologised to him for not telling him about Henry sooner? Had she just admitted that she regretted that fact? That she regretted the fact that she had kept Henry from his father? Emma didn’t hear the door open and jumped when Ruby’s hand came to rest gently on her back.

“What happened?” Ruby asked gently. She had heard Emma’s sobs through the door before she had hurriedly put a DVD on for Henry to mask the sound. It had also prevented her from surreptitiously eavesdropping on the rest of the conversation and the not knowing had been killing
her for ten full minutes.

“He’s a match,” Emma said, wiping her face again. “He’s going to donate.”

Ruby’s face split into a wide smile and she wrapped her arms around her friend. “That’s amazing news,” she exclaimed into blonde hair. “Hang on,” she pulled back, “why are you crying?”

Emma shrugged. It was hard to pinpoint exactly which of the myriad emotions she felt had caused her to break down on the phone. It was safe to say she was overwhelmed in any case.

“I’m going to tell Henry,” Emma said.

“Well you might have some questions about where Regina is to deal with first,” Ruby said. “I was as evasive as possible but that kid is annoyingly perceptive.”

Emma laughed. She knew that to be true. Although she didn’t lie to her son, there had been many times already in his short life when he had picked up on something far deeper about a subject or event he had been privy to. Perhaps Ruby was right and he already knew about Regina. She hadn’t wanted to tell him about two potentially important people in his life at once but could see little way around it at this point. If he wanted to know what was going on with Regina, she wasn’t going to lie to him any more. And now Neal was a match and going to be in his life, Henry deserved to know about him too.

When she walked back into the living room, Henry’s eyes were peering expectantly over the arm of the sofa, evidently waiting for his mother to return. Emma smiled at him and he grinned back, although not as widely as his healthy self would. She saw Ruby out of the apartment and then settled on the sofa beside Henry and turned towards the young boy.

“Was that Gina?” Henry asked.

“No,” Emma said. “That was someone else.”


“That’s two questions,” Emma reasoned. “Which one do you want answered first because they both have long answers.”

“Gina,” Henry said firmly, completely disinterested in whoever else was on the phone.

Emma nodded. Of course Henry wanted to know about his favourite doctor. But where to begin? She had never had to tell her son about a girlfriend before. He was too young for her to really explain it when she and Lily had gotten together and there hadn’t been anyone else. But now he was not only old enough but he knew Regina. And she suspected Ruby might be correct in her prediction that her son had already picked up on something between the two women. He was not only perceptive but knew his mother extremely well.

“Well, no, Regina isn’t going to come over to ours tonight, Henry,” Emma began. “But there is something I need to tell you about Regina.”

“What?”

“Well, you know how she was your doctor and how she helped me when you were sick the first time we went to the hospital?”

“Yeah.”
“And you know how she’s been helping Doctor Zelena find out what’s wrong with you and make you feel better?”

“Yeah.”

If Emma didn’t know better, she could swear she could see the beginnings of a smirk on her son’s face. But six year olds couldn’t smirk, could they?

“Henry, Regina and I became friends when you were in the hospital and even now you’re being looked after by Doctor Zelena, I still like her and I like to spend time with her.”

“Like yesterday when she made lasagne?”

“Exactly,” Emma nodded. “So in the future Regina will be coming over to our apartment sometimes to see you and me and maybe one day we’ll even go over to her place when you’re better.”

“Is she your girlfriend now?”

The question was so blunt, so simple, that Emma felt almost foolish for having danced around the answer for so long. Ok, she and Regina had officially classified their budding relationship as ‘dating’ but that was just semantics to Henry.

“Yes,” Emma replied. “Yes she is.”

“Cool,” Henry said with a smile. “I like Gina and I know she likes you too.”

Momentarily thrown by the ease at which Henry had accepted the revelation that his mother was dating his doctor, Emma opened and closed her mouth a few times.

“So, are you ok if Regina comes over for dinner some nights?”

“Yep,” Henry nodded. “I like her. She makes you happy. You’re more fun when you’re happy.”

Emma beamed at her son. She wasn’t sure what reaction she was expecting. She knew Henry liked Regina, after all. But it had still been worrying her that he would feel like Emma was no longer giving him one hundred per cent of her attention. The fact that her beautiful, young, perceptive son had seen that Regina made her happy, however, melted Emma’s heart as she realised her son recognised that what she had with Regina had only a positive impact on the way Emma interacted with him. And of course, Henry came first, a fact Regina understood and accepted. It was one of the things she liked most about the brunette. Her eyes glazed over temporarily as she thought about all the other things she liked about Regina before Henry’s voice jolted her back into the presence.

“Mum?”

“What?” Emma asked, eyes snapping back to her son.

“Who were you talking to on the phone in the kitchen.”

“Oh.”

Emma had momentarily forgotten the other piece of news she had to break. One which, if she was honest, affected her son far more than her new relationship with Regina. This was it; the moment her son found out about his father. Emma wondered whether the fact that she never knew her own birth parents contributed to the way she felt about Neal and his absence from Henry’s life. More to
the point, the distain she felt at herself once she realised she, Emma, was the reason Henry hadn’t had a father. If she had just gone back to *The Rabbit Hole* as soon as she had found out she was pregnant, maybe Neal would have been involved right from the start. Would that have been better? Or worse? Had she done the right thing raising Henry alone? She was sure she was right to contact Neal now, knowing he could save their son. But had she done something unforgivable by keeping father and son apart for six years.

“Mum?”

She’d clearly zoned out again and Henry was looking curiously at her.

“Sorry, kid. I was just thinking.”

“About Doctor Gina?”

“No, actually,” Emma sighed. “I was thinking about the man who phoned earlier. The one I was talking to in the kitchen.”

“Who was he?”

“Your dad.”

Henry blinked several times, his brain seemingly trying to process the massive piece of information which had been imparted to him in two tiny words. He couldn’t remember the last time his mother had brought up his dad. He knew he had one, of course, but that was about it. Anything else he had wanted to know, any information he had tried to get out of the blonde had been sparse.

“My dad?”

“Yeah. I found him. Last weekend. That’s why I had to go away for a few days when Grandma and Grandad looked after you.”

“You found my dad? Where was he?”

“In Cardiff,” Emma said. “The big city in Wales.”

“Why did you go to find him?”

Emma reached over and clasped Henry’s hot little hands in her own. “Because you’re sick, kiddo,” she reminded him gently. “And the quickest way to make sure you get better is to find someone you’re related to. Now, I can’t help you because my blood is different to yours and you know Grandma and Grandad aren’t my real parents. There was no one left to ask so I went to find your dad to ask him to help us. To help you.”

“To help me get better?”

“Yep,” Emma nodded. “And he just phoned me to tell me he wants to help you and that he has the right blood.”

“He’s giving me some blood?”

“Sort of,” Emma said. “It’s like blood but we get it from inside bones. How about you get Regina to explain when you see her. She’s much better at the doctor stuff than me, right?”

“Right,” Henry agreed. “But my dad, is he coming here?”
His face lit up as he vocalised the idea. Emma saw the look of excitement in his eyes as he realised that he was finally, after six years, going to meet his father. Yet another pang of guilt shot through Emma at the fact that she had kept the two of them apart, followed by a stab of sadness at the knowledge that she’d never get to meet her own parents. Not that she regretted being fostered by Mary and David for a moment but everyone wants to know where they came from, including Henry.

“Yes,” Emma said. “He’s going to have to come up to the hospital to get you better. I think we’re going to talk to Doctor Zelena on Friday and find out when we can do this little operation to make you feel better.”

“Operation?”

Fear flashed across Henry’s face, replacing the excitement which had illuminated his young features. Emma’s heart broke as she saw the terror on his face. She supposed she should have been preparing him for the bone marrow transplant already but she hadn’t wanted to get his hopes up before they had found a donor.

“Don’t worry,” she assured him. “I promise you Doctor Zelena and Regina are going to make you all better again very soon.”

Henry nodded but didn’t look convinced. Emma found herself wishing she could phone Regina, ask her to explain the bone marrow transplant to her son. But she decided against it, wanting to introduce the idea of Regina as a feature of their lives slowly to Henry. She also hadn’t had a chance to tell Regina about Neal and the fact that he was a match. It was a conversation that warranted more than a few snatched seconds as well, she decided.

“Do you have any questions?” Emma asked. “About your dad or Regina?”

The little boy looked thoughtful for a moment, considering what he wanted to know. Emma, on her part, was wondering which of the two people she wanted Henry to ask about. Of course Neal was his father and the curiosity there was natural, but she also really, really wanted him to be accepting of Regina as her girlfriend.

“Does Regina know my dad?”

Huh, Emma thought to herself. Trust Henry to ask about both of them in one question.

“Yes,” Emma said. “Well, she came with me to Cardiff so she met him. But only once and only for a few minutes. They didn’t really talk and Neal doesn’t know Regina is my girlfriend.”

“Does Neal have a girlfriend?”

“I don’t know,” Emma admitted. “Maybe you could ask him that when he comes up to London.”

“Ok,” Henry said, stifling a yawn.

Emma coaxed her suddenly exhausted son up, realising it was way past his bedtime and the only reason he was awake was that he had been woken up by her and Ruby. She lifted him into her arms and carried him back to bed, tucking him into the rumpled sheets.

“Night, my baby,” Emma said, kissing his hot forehead.

“I love you too.”

Emma left the room quietly and closed the door. She ran her hands through her hair and began to tidy up the apartment, killing time until she knew Regina would be home from work, showered and fed. Her fingers itched to call the brunette, to tell her all that had happened during the course of the evening. Well, almost everything. She wasn’t sure she was quite ready to confess the way she felt about Neal and Henry’s relationship. Or, more to the point, the fact that due to her own actions, the two didn’t even have a relationship … until now.

Hard as Regina tried, Google was beckoning her. While she was studying to become a doctor, her professors had warned her against taking the job home, becoming too wrapped up in a patient’s fate, being unable to separate herself as a doctor and her personal feelings. For the most part, she was able to compartmentalise. It didn’t mean she didn’t care. She did. She cared deeply for her patients. But she had also learned that she was unable to do her job successfully if her professional opinion was blinded by her emotions. But there were still a few patients who battled their way into her heart.

X-Linked Lymphoproliferative Disease. A nasty, difficult to treat illness at the best of times, let alone when it ravages its victims at such a young age. Regina had only read case studies about the disease before Henry Swan appeared in her life; the rarity such that few doctors actually ever treated a case themselves. She was still amazed and proud that Zelena had caught it and was offering her friend any support she could when it came to the treatment. Although there was only so much they could do. At the end of the day, Henry needed a bone marrow transplant and fast.

The statistics and information she found on Google that evening could not be considered comforting. She had known they wouldn’t make her feel better when she had typed the name of the disease into the search engine. But it hadn’t stopped her doing it. Anything she could learn, anything she could discover might help Henry. Except there wasn’t anything. Just depressing survival rates and one possible cure.

She had discovered a research group who were doing gene testing but they were nowhere near being successful, nor implanting their research into a patient. Even if they were, Regina wasn’t sure how Emma would feel about her son being a guinea pig for an untested and unverified cure. If it was her son … but it wasn’t. Henry was Emma’s and the research was incomplete anyway. The only chance Henry had was a bone marrow transplant.

An unpleasant, draining and dangerous experience in itself, Regina hated to think of Henry going through the discomfort and pain of such a procedure. But it could cure him. As someone who had presented symptoms early and, as of Tuesday, was cancer-free, Henry had a better chance than most XLP patients of successfully seeing through the bone marrow treatment and making a full recovery. If they could find a match.

It was Wednesday, Regina mused. Three days. That was how long Neal had had to consider whether or not he wanted to save his son. Regina’s blood boiled in her veins at the thought of the man, hiding away in Cardiff, letting Henry’s life slip through his fingers just because -

Her phone began to ring, interrupted her dark thoughts and she felt her heart lighten a little at the name on the screen.

“Hi,” she said, shutting off her iPad and eclipsing the XLP data from view. “How was your evening?”

“Neal’s a match and Henry knows about us,” Emma said in a rush.
Sitting upright, Regina’s mouth opened in shock. “Wait, what?”

In her own apartment, Emma climbed into bed in her pyjamas and began to recount her evening to Regina. Well, most of it.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: should Emma be telling Regina how she feels about Henry and Neal? What are your thoughts about our two ladies’ budding relationship and the affect Neal may have on them?
The hospital room was decorated with Tarzan this time. Henry’s eyes roved over the impressive mural, taking in the characters and colours as Belle attached the drip to his arm which would give his immune system the boost it needed. His appetite had waned significantly over the past twenty-four hours. Emma sat beside him, nervous. She knew Regina would have told Zelena that Neal had agreed to donate and, presumably, the redhead would appear soon to discuss treatment options. Just because Emma had been praying for a match for her son didn’t mean she wasn’t afraid of what came next. Now they had someone to donate the bone marrow, Henry was going to have to undergo the transplant itself.

Belle finished her work and said goodbye, heading off to let Zelena know the Swans had arrived. Henry was already snuggling back into his bed, eyes drooping closed. His energy levels had depleted too, Emma had noticed.

“Kid, in a minute Doctor West is going to come in here and talk to us about what’s going to happen next to make you better.”

“With my dad?” Henry asked. There had been many questions about Neal since Emma had told her son she had met with his birth father. Frankly, she was just pleased he was distracted from being so sick.

“Yes,” she nodded. “So don’t go to sleep, ok?”

“But I’m tired,” Henry protested as he began to yawn, whether out of protest at the request or genuine coincidence, Emma wasn’t sure.

She sighed and nodded her consent. Perhaps it was best if Zelena discussed the future treatment with her first and then she relayed it to Henry. She knew the paediatrician had experience talking to children about their illnesses but she didn’t want to deny Henry sleep just so he could hear about his upcoming treatment.

Barely five minutes after Henry had begun to snore lightly, the door opened. Zelena entered followed by a familiar face.

“Regina? I mean,” she glanced at the brunette’s co-worker, “Doctor Mills, what are you doing here?”

“Relax, Zee knows,” Regina chuckled.

Emma’s eyes widened slightly and she looked back at Zelena who was grinning at her.

“I do know,” she confirmed. “And I think it’s great. Just, maybe don’t parade it around the hospital until Henry’s better.”
“So he’s going to get better?” Emma asked, hope flickering to life inside her at the offhand comment.

“We hope so,” Zelena nodded. “Regina told me Henry’s biological father is a match and is willing to donate so as soon as we can get him to come to London and begin the donation process the better. I asked Regina to be here with me as I talk you through what’s going to happen next. It’s going to be a tough process and I think it’s important you have someone supporting you.”

Emma couldn’t help but smile dopily at Regina and nod her agreement. She was, she realised, immensely relieved to see the brunette. She trusted Zelena implicitly as Henry’s doctor but she was glad she too had someone to lean on while taking in the next stage of the hell she was currently living through. Her parents were great but Bristol was too far away at times like this.

“Ok,” Emma said. “Henry just went to sleep so can you explain everything to me now and then we can give him the clipped notes later?”

Zelena nodded. She liked to tell her young patients what was happening to them and how their treatment was working, believing that it would help them not only come to terms with the time they were required to spend in hospital but reach an understanding about how their bodies are affected by the illness too. Together, the three women sat in chairs beside the window. Regina threaded her fingers through Emma’s and squeezed softly.

“Henry is going to require a haematopoietic stem cell transplant,” Zelena began, “which is going to be administered via an IV drip just like the one he’s on now. It’s not an operation and we can perform it when he’s in a room just like this one. At the moment there’s no reason for him to undergo any more drastic treatment and, assuming the blood tests I’ll do later remain cancer free, he’s got a good chance of survival.”

“And if he’s not cancer free?” Emma asked.

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it,” Regina said.

Emma nodded her agreement but her face looked grim. The fact that neither doctor was willing to answer told her Henry’s odd of beating the disease went way down were he to develop cancer. She blinked back tears.

“The transplant will replace the damaged stem cells Henry’s body is producing at the moment. Although we traditionally use stem cells of bone marrow, it is also possible to use some peripheral blood samples so both methods will be considered, depending on the donor’s suitability. We’ll assess that at a later date. Before the transplant happens, however, Henry is going to need to be administered some pretty powerful chemotherapy agents which are intended to kill off all of his own stems cells with the XLP genetics. If there are cancer cells present, of course they’ll impact those too. His body is going to become very weak; a necessity if we want the transplant to be success. If we were to attempt the transplant without the chemotherapy, his body would reject the foreign cells and the XLP stem cells would continue to dominate his bone marrow.

“In terms of risk, there is always a certain amount both before, during and after the procedure. However, we will be monitoring very closely and there really is no other option. Despite the risks, a transplant like this is Henry’s best chance. If the treatment is fully successful, the disease should be eradicated and Henry will go back to being a happy, healthy little boy.”

“He’ll be completely cured?” Emma asked.

Regina and Zelena both nodded.
“When can Henry’s father come to London?” Zelena asked.

“I don’t actually know,” Emma said. “But I think he’d be willing to come pretty quickly.”

“Good,” Zelena said. “The sooner the better. We’ll also need to run our own tests just to make sure he is a suitable match and there aren’t any problems the hospital in Cardiff didn’t pick up on. Do you think he could come in on Monday?”

“I’ll ask,” Emma said, swallowing thickly at the thought of seeing Henry’s father again so soon. And, more to the point, introducing Henry to his father. “How long will Henry have to have chemo before the transplant?”

“It depends on the blood results,” Zelena admitted. “If there are cancer cells present, perhaps a week. If not, I suspect three or four days would be enough.”

“And he would need to be in hospital during that time,” Regina added. “As soon as the treatment starts he needs to be in a controlled environment where we can minimise his risk of coming into contact with viruses or infections. We’ll be sure to secure you a private room as soon as we know when Neal can come.”

Emma nodded and turned to look towards Henry who was still sleeping peacefully, blissfully unaware that the three women in the corner were talking about pumping harmful chemicals deliberately into his body to suppress his immune system. The thought of weakening Henry even further made her feel sick. It seemed illogical, somehow, but she knew Regina and Zelena were going to do right by her son.

“I’ll go and take that blood sample,” Zelena said, standing up. “You two can take a moment to talk.”

Emma nodded and looked back at the brunette, catching the pitying look on Regina’s face before the older woman schooled her features into a smile.

“It’s going to be ok,” Regina murmured as her friend moved towards the sleeping boy. “Henry is going to make it. Now Neal is able to donate, he’s got a great chance.”

“Does he?” Emma asked. “Really, Regina? Can you tell me a percentage?”

Biting her lip, Regina shook her head. “Not yet, no,” she admitted. “But we have to stay positive. So far, everything is going great. You found the donor, Henry’s last results were cancer-free and as soon as Neal comes to London we’ll be able to start the process.”

Regina had been over the moon to discover that Neal was agreeing to donate. She was a little taken aback to hear how excited Henry was about meeting his father. It was natural, she supposed, for the little boy to want to meet his birth father but she was a little upset on Emma’s behalf when the blonde had described their conversation. Emma, on the other hand, seemed to have accepted Henry’s reaction. When Regina had probed a little deeper, Emma had admitted that it was because she had spent her own childhood wishing she could meet her biological parents. “I know how he feels,” she had said.

“Do you have any questions?” Regina asked, wanting to make sure the blonde had all the information she required.

“Not now,” Emma said. “Are you staying here with us for a while?”

Regina shook her head. “I’ve got to get back to A and E in five minutes. I don’t finish until seven
tonight.”

“Would you like to come over to mine later?” Emma asked. “I mean, if you’re tired and just want to crash or you have other plans or -”

“Emma,” Regina interrupted. “I’d love to come over, thank you.”

The blonde grinned, despite the news she had just been given about Henry’s upcoming treatment. “Can you help me tell Henry about what’s going to happen to him? Tonight, or maybe tomorrow morning if he’s asleep by the time you arrive?”

“Tomorrow morning?”

Emma gulped. Too soon, she thought to herself. Of course Regina wasn’t going to stay the night. They barely knew each other. And yet, in the short time they had been acquainted, Emma had grown closer to Regina than anyone else in her life aside from Henry, her parents and Ruby. Judging by the brunette’s reaction, however, Regina wasn’t ready for that level of closeness.

“No, sorry,” Emma said. “I didn’t mean that.”

“I have to work tomorrow,” Regina said simply. “I wasn’t saying I didn’t want to stay over. I just have to be at the hospital by seven.”

“Oh.” Hope, once again, ignited inside Emma. “So …”

“Yes,” Regina said. “I’ll help you tell Henry tonight or early tomorrow morning or tomorrow evening or some time on Sunday when I finally have a day off.”

“Really?”

“If you think you can put up with me for the whole weekend, then yes,” Regina said. “I’d much rather spend time with you and Henry than hang out on my own.”

“Great,” Emma said. “Just come over whenever you’re done tonight and text me when you arrive.”

“I will,” Regina said, standing up and prompting Emma to do the same.

The movement was noticed by Henry who, until that moment, had been chatting away to Zelena as she drew some of his blood.

“Hi Gina,” he called, waving the hand not attached to the IV.

“Hello Henry,” Regina said, making her way over to the bed. “How are you feeling today.”

A little tired of that question being asked of him, Henry shrugged and instead directed a query of his own back at Regina.

“What was my dad like?”

“Pardon?” Regina frowned.

“Mum said you went to Cardiff with her to find my dad because you’re her girlfriend now, what was he like?”

Ignoring the use of the ‘g’ word and presuming Emma had simply not known how to define their relationship to the six-year-old, Regina breezed past the awkward moment which settled over
Zelena and Emma and addressed the inquisitive child before her.

“He was nice,” she said simply. “He has the same eyes as you and he has brown hair and he works at the university.”

Henry rolled his eyes. “I know that, Mum already told me. What else do you know?”

“Nothing,” Regina chuckled. “I only met him once. I guess you’ll have to wait until you meet him.”

“Soon?” he asked, turning to Emma with excitement etched in his features.

“Soon,” Emma nodded, unsure whether she wanted time to speed up and for Henry to get better or for time to slow down to delay the moment when Neal would become an irremovable feature of their lives.

“I’ve got to get to work now, Henry, but I’ll see you later.”

“You’re coming over for tea?”

“I am,” Regina said. “If that’s ok with you.”

Henry nodded enthusiastically. Emma couldn’t help but smile. She was immensely glad she at least didn’t have to worry about whether Henry liked the brunette. That much was obvious.

“See you later,” Regina said, patting Henry’s leg through the thin hospital blanket and turning to Emma. She had been about to kiss her but then realised that her smirking best friend was still standing beside them. “See you later too,” she said, settling for just smiling at the blonde.

“See you,” Emma nodded, watching Regina leave before turning back to Henry who was already asking Zelena why she needed to take more blood from him. She sank into her chair as the paediatrician expertly explained to Henry what the test was for without using the word cancer. How Zelena and Regina dealt with sick children every day, Emma would never be able to understand but she was immensely glad the two women were there to help her explain to Henry when the difficult questions inevitably arose.

By the time Emma’s phone lit up, alerting her to Regina’s arrival that evening, Henry was already asleep. He had tried adamantly to stay awake to see her but after he had eaten a small portion of the vegetable based dinner Emma had cooked for them, he had passed out on the sofa. She had carried him to his bed, wiped the sweat beads from his forehead with a wet flannel and crept from his room. Curling up on the edge of the sofa with a glass of wine, she had turned her attention to scrolling through her backlog of emails. Killian was already back in town and Emma felt back for slacking off from her work even though her boss had insisted she was fine to take as much time as she needed.

Regina’s arrival pulled her happily away from her work not long after she began, however, and she nipped quickly out of her apartment to open the front door. The two shared a short kiss in the entrance hall before returning upstairs.

“Henry’s asleep,” Emma said. “So I guess you’re stuck with me for the night.”

Regina smiled. “I think I can deal with that.”

Unable to stop herself, she stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Emma, kissing her
properly for the first time since the Tuesday. Three days, she had realised, was far too long to be separated from Emma Swan’s mouth. Their lips moved tenderly, becoming reacquainted with one another. Emma’s hands landed on Regina’s hips, pulling their bodies even closer. To feel one another pressed tightly together caused liquid heat to shoot to both their cores. It was Emma who pulled away first, needing oxygen.

“I missed you,” Regina sighed as she watched Emma evidently trying to tamp down her desire by moving away and pouring the brunette a glass of wine.

“I missed you too,” Emma admitted as she handed the drink over. “Is that crazy?”

The two women had only known each other a few weeks and their time together had, aside from their trip to Cardiff, been spent predominantly in the hospital. It seemed too soon to miss one another. They were still getting to know each other, after all.

“If it is then I’m crazy too,” Regina said, sitting down on the sofa beside Emma who had resumed her previous position.

Emma paused for a moment and then said; “crazy’s good, right?”

Regina nodded vehemently and Emma laughed. Perhaps it was crazy that the two women had become so close so quickly. Perhaps it was the circumstances. Henry’s illness had interrupted Emma’s life and thrown the women together in an unconventional style. The fact that Regina had treated Henry and was able to offer support and advice when it came to the sick child might have impacted the way their relationship had developed. And yet somehow Emma knew it had nothing to do with Henry. He may have been the reason they had met but had fate colluded to get them together in some other way she knew her feelings for Regina would be exactly the same.

“So, Neal’s coming to town?”

Emma nodded. “Sunday. I called him earlier. He’s going to be up here some time in the afternoon he reckons. I’ve already made an appointment with Zelena for Monday morning to run those final tests and get the transplant process started.”

“How do you feel about it?” Regina asked.

Their conversation earlier in the week about Neal had been … off. Regina couldn’t describe it but she got the feeling Emma was holding something back when it came to her son’s father. She had been forthcoming enough in the fact that Neal was a match and that Henry was excited to meet his father. But when Regina had asked Emma what she felt about the man appearing in their lives, the blonde’s answers had been rather monosyllabic. She hadn’t pushed on the phone, however, and had wanted to wait until they were in person before asking further questions.

“I’m just glad he’s agreed to help Henry,” Emma shrugged.

“And what about the fact that he’s going to be in London, meeting Henry and everything that is inevitably going to come from that?”

There was another shrug. “He’s Henry’s dad. He was going to meet him sooner or later I guess. Every kid needs a father.”

“Every kid needs parents who love them,” Regina amended. “Gender doesn’t matter. Henry has you and he clearly receives all the love he needs. Just because you two don’t fit the stereotype of a nuclear family, doesn’t mean anything is wrong or missing.”
“But he wants to meet his dad,” Emma said. “He was so excited when I told him. It was wrong of me to keep them apart for so long.”

Regina looked into the blonde’s face and saw traces of sadness and regret etched there. She frowned. “You feel like you weren’t enough for him? That he was waiting for Neal to enter his life?”

“It seemed like he had been,” Emma shrugged. “He’d asked me a few questions about his dad in the past but because I had so little information the conversations were always short. I guess he’s spent his whole life wondering about this mystery man and now he finally gets to meet him. It feels like he’s built Neal up into some super-dad who’s going to swoop in and rescue him from the mother who kept them apart.”

Tears glistened in Emma’s eyes as she spoke and Regina moved towards her, wrapping herself around the blonde’s body and hugging her tightly.

“Neal will never replace you in Henry’s life,” she murmured into Emma’s ear. “And you didn’t keep them apart. You did a brave, selfless thing by raising Henry as a single mother. It’s not like Neal would have stepped up back then, right? Henry knows you love him and he knows you’re the one he can rely on for everything in his life. He’s just excited about meeting his dad for the first time, that’s all. Neal isn’t going to take Henry away from you in any way and I suspect once they’ve met for the first time, Henry’s illusion of his super-dad will be brought back to earth with a bump.”

“He’s saving Henry’s life,” Emma pointed out. “He is kind of a superhero.”

“He’s a bouncer at a nightclub.”

“Who’s saving our son’s life.”

“Our son?”

“It sounds weird to me too,” Emma admitted. “Henry’s been ‘my son’ for six years and now I have to share him with someone else. It’s going to take some getting used to.”

“You really think Neal will stick around?”

Emma shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Do you want him to?”

“For Henry’s sake, yeah,” Emma nodded.

Regina couldn’t deny that she hoped Neal did come through for his son. Once the two met and began to form a relationship, it was paramount that Henry received some stability from Neal. She was sceptical about the man’s ability to deliver on that but hoped he would prove her wrong. She was less keen on the idea of Neal being around Emma more. The man was … sleazy.

“Can we change the subject?” Emma said suddenly

Pulled from her reverie, Regina nodded and forced a smile as Emma wiped the tear tracks from her face. “Sure, what to?”

“The fact that Henry referred to you as my girlfriend, perhaps?”
Regina laughed. She had been meaning to tease Emma about that since it had happened and was delighted to get the opportunity to do so.

“Yes, jumping the gun there a little, Miss Swan,” she said, in a mock scolding voice. “I do believe we had merely used the term dating.”

“Have you ever tried to explain dating to a six-year-old?” Emma chuckled. “Trust me, girlfriend is easier.”

“That’s true,” Regina replied. “Sounds better as well.”

Emma’s eyes snapped to the twinkling brown orbs of Regina. “We … we’ve been on one date. I mean, I’ve not even had a chance to take you out myself yet and what with Henry’s transplant coming up I’m not going to get the opportunity for weeks and then -”

“Let’s just cut to the chase,” Regina said. “If that’s where this is heading, and I very much hope it is, then why wait?”

“I thought we’d planned to take things slowly,” Emma said. “For Henry’s sake.”

“Henry already knows about us,” Regina pointed out. “It took him three days to find out and your parents were told mere hours after we got back to London. Ruby and Billy picked up on something before we were even together and Zee worked it out too. No matter how slowly you wanted to take this, I think the circumstances have other ideas.”

“But what if things don’t work out?” Emma asked.

“Pessimist,” Regina scoffed. “Henry already thinks we’re in a relationship. We spent the weekend together tracking down his father and we didn’t exactly meet in a normal way so why conform to whatever you think is socially acceptable when it comes to timings? I know this is quick, Emma, and I know you want to take things slowly, but I need you to know that I don’t want to. I want this, us. I want to see where this goes and find out what the future holds and I want to be by your side during Henry’s treatment and then beyond that, once he’s better, I want to be there too. I want you, Emma.”

The blonde let out a shuddering breath as Regina finished speaking. The beautiful earnest face of the brunette smiled almost shyly at her as Emma processed what had been said to her. She could feel her heart thumping in her chest, her blood pounding in her ears. Regina was in this. Regina was committed to her, wanted her, wanted a future with her. And Henry. It had been a long time since Emma had imagined a future for herself which involved anyone but Henry. Regina was right, it was fast, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t already tell that there was something wonderfully different about the relationship the two women had tentatively been starting. Now, however, it seemed Regina wanted them to dive right in.

“What about Henry?” Emma asked. “He can’t get hurt by this.”

“I have no intention of hurting Henry,” Regina said. “Nor you.”

Emma scanned the brunette’s face and saw nothing but honesty and defiance staring back at her. Regina really did want this. Regina really did want her. Regina really wasn’t going to hurt her, not like Lily. Regina was never going to be like Lily.

“Ok,” Emma whispered. “Ok.”

Their lips met in another soft kiss which quickly escalated as Regina’s tongue grazed Emma’s
lower lip. Their mouths parted, tasting one another again as Emma wrapped her arms around Regina and pulled their bodies together. The sofa was wide enough for them to lie down, mouths still joined as they wriggled to get comfortable. Regina ran her hands up and down Emma’s back, feeling the muscular body through her t-shirt and wondering, not for the first time, how magnificent the toned blonde would look naked. Emma’s own fingers were tangled in Regina’s hair as the younger woman took control of the kiss, tilting Regina’s head to allow her tongue to plunder her mouth in the most delectable way.

Soon, Regina found Emma on top of her, knees straddling her hips as their tongues continued to dance. She palmed Emma’s taut ass through her denim jeans, occasionally running the tip of her finger along the top of the material and itching to slide beneath it. Emma’s hands were roughly grasping her breasts, causing Regina to arch up from the sofa in delight as her hard nipples were pinched between eager fingers.

“Wait,” Regina said, pushing Emma back slightly.

The kiss ended but Emma stayed where she was, eyes black with desire. Regina didn’t mind; the weight of Emma on her hips was divine.

“If we don’t stop now,” she breathed heavily, “I don’t think we’ll be stopping at all.”

It was a warning, really. Emma had been the one who wanted to go slowly. She had been the one who had been wary of beginning a relationship not just with Henry’s doctor but with a woman who might actually become a significant person in their lives. But after their earlier conversation and Regina’s admittance that she was well and truly committed to their budding relationship, she needed to let the blonde know that in addition to being crazy about Emma as a person, she was also very, very aroused by her.

“If I stay over here tonight,” she continued. “I don’t think I’ll be able to control my desire for you.”

“We’ve slept in a bed together before,” Emma pointed out, blushing at the compliment.

It was true. Considering the fact that they’d barely known one another a few weeks and had been dating less than one, they had already spent two nights in the same bed. And yet, what had occurred that evening was far more sexual than anything they had previously experienced together.

“I know but things are different now,” Regina said.

“I’m that irresistible, huh?” Emma smirked.

Regina rolled her eyes at the blonde but couldn’t deny it. Instead she leveled Emma with a smoldering gaze and boldly said; “I have been waiting from the moment we met for the opportunity to fuck you as my girlfriend.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: This is the last T rated chapter. The next one will be E and I suspect it will be 99% sex with a little bit of fluff at the end! Also, to the many people who reviewed the previous chapter and were a little concerned about the way Emma spoke regarding
Neal and Henry’s relationship, I hope the ladies’ conversation in this chapter was more agreeable. Reviews are love!
Emma’s eyes darkened impossibly further as the curse word fell from Regina’s kiss-swollen lips. She knew it was fast. She knew she had been the one who had wanted to take things slowly. She knew that there was more than just her heart on the line if she got involved with Regina and then their relationship didn’t work out. But she also trusted Regina not to hurt her, nor Henry. Not deliberately. If she didn’t do this, if she didn’t take the risk, she’d never know what the two of them could have had. She knew their relationship would remain without sex but she also knew that in that moment, she wanted Regina as badly as the brunette wanted her.

She climbed off Regina and held out her hand to pull the older woman to her feet. She didn’t say anything; she didn’t need to. She popped her head around the doorframe to Henry’s room on their way across the apartment. The boy was fast asleep. Thankfully. Then the two women walked towards Emma’s bedroom. Regina glanced around as she stepped inside. The room wasn’t large but it was neat and tastefully decorated. There were framed photos of Henry, Emma’s parents and a few friends on her dresser and a teetering stack of books on the bedside table. Occupational hazard, Regina supposed. The bed was made and now Emma stood almost awkwardly at the foot of it, as if she wasn’t sure what to do next.

Not wanting to push Emma into anything, Regina sat herself down on the crisp bed linen and smiled reassuringly at the blonde. It had been a while since Emma had been physically intimate with anyone, Regina knew, and much as she herself desperately desired the young woman, it was important Emma took whatever was about to happen at her own pace. After a few seconds, Emma came and sat next to her, fingers fidgeting in her lip.

“If you’re not ready,” Regina began but Emma shook her head, cutting her off.

“I am,” Emma insisted. “I want this, Regina. You have no idea how much I want this.” Her eyes skated over the body beside her. Even fully dressed she found Regina’s body arousing. “But it’s just been a while. I guess I’m a little out of practice. I don’t want to let you down.”

“Honey, you could never let me down,” Regina said, taking Emma’s twisting fingers between her own and lacing them together. “Whatever happens, I’m sure it will be great.”

Emma looked at Regina and couldn’t help but smile at the woman who was being so kind and patient with her. Except she wasn’t really being patient. Less than a week after they first kissed and they were about to sleep together. Not that Emma was complaining. Despite being nervous, Emma knew she wanted Regina, wanted to be with her, wanted to touch her, kiss her, lick her, caress her, bring her to her peak.

Regina let out a little squeak as Emma’s lips suddenly pressed against her own, surprised at the sudden move. She quickly recovered however as Emma pushed her gently backwards onto the bed.
and straddled the brunette once more. Regina eagerly grasped Emma’s ass, feeling the heat of her flesh even through the denim. Already Emma’s fingers were fumbling to push Regina’s cardigan from her shoulders and she reluctantly broke their contact so she could sit up and shrug off her top, Emma perched in her lap. She smiled up at the blonde before laying obediently back down and allowing Emma to dominate their kiss.

She would never get enough of the taste of the doctor, Emma decided as her tongue pried open the plump lips once more, her hands now sliding up beneath Regina’s blouse. Hot, smooth skin against her palms made her rock her hips forwards, a breathless moan swallowed by the brunette as the seam of her jeans rubbed against her own core. She may have been a little hesitant a few seconds earlier but now it was all flooding back to her. Regina was right. It was going to be amazing. She wriggled the blouse upwards until she tugged it above Regina’s breasts. Her hands covered lace, the cups scratching erotically against her hands as she squeezed the generous globes. Regina shivered under her touch and Emma smirked. She squeezed again as she bit Regina’s lip and was rewarded with a gasp of delight. Evidently the brunette liked a little pain mixed with her pleasure.

Suddenly, Emma found herself on her back, Regina sitting breathlessly above her, blouse scrunched up above her breasts and her cheeks flushed. Emma didn’t think the woman had ever looked more beautiful. She watched as Regina tossed her top away, leaving her in just a delicate black bra. Through the material, Emma could see the darkened shape of her nipples. Her mouth watered. She sat upwards, arms wrapped around Regina to keep her in place and also to undo the clasp of her bra. As soon as it was free, Regina pulled it from between their bodies and pushed Emma onto her back. Emma lay down, eyes transfixed to the bare breasts before her.

“Like what you see?” Regina asked, chuckling at the dumbstruck look on Emma’s face.

“You’re gorgeous,” she managed to say as she reached out, cupping the naked flesh for the first time.

Regina sighed in delight at the delicate caress and then hissed as Emma’s fingers pinched her hardened nipple. The woman grinned wolfishly up at her and Regina leaned down to kiss the glistening look away. Already she could tell that Emma was an astute lover when it came to reading bodies; and she was delighted. As Emma kissed her, Regina focused her attention on undressing Emma, pulling the jumper over her head and pulling off her tank top. The simple but sexy blue bra Emma was wearing followed soon afterwards and, at last, the two women found themselves pressed hotly together, nothing between their breasts as their mouths battled for dominance.

It wasn’t enough though. Even as their taut nipple rubbed seductively against one another, each woman burned for more. Emma made the first move, sliding her hand between their bodies with difficulty and beginning to undo Regina’s slacks. Awkward though the angle was, soon Regina was kicking her trousers from her ankles, toeing off her socks as she did so. She was still on top and as she sat up, her black thong the only item of clothing remaining, Emma’s hands fell to her hips, thumbs stroking the skin there as she looked up at the brunette above her. They paused, taking in one another again; Emma’s eyes trailing over almost every inch of Regina’s flesh and Regina admiring the pale pink nipples she had previously been pressed against. She wondered what they would taste like.

And then she wasn’t wondering as she lowered her mouth and flicked the tip of her tongue over the hard bud, causing Emma to cry out and fingers to curl into her hair. Regina obliged happily as Emma pulled her closer and sucked the pebbled skin into her mouth, twirling her tongue around the sensitive flesh. The blonde arched into the teasing, tender touches, heart racing against her chest as her desperation for the woman against her grew. Regina could feel it, could tell Emma needed to be touched. And Regina was more than happy to oblige. Despite the blonde’s fingers in
her hair, she began to move her mouth lower, kissing her way down the toned, pale stomach, her tongue tracing the defined muscles which, as she suspected, were divine.

Sliding somewhat elegantly from the bed, Regina knelt between Emma’s spread legs, the blonde still splayed on the bed. When she felt Regina unbutton her jeans, however, Emma propped herself up on her elbows and gazed down her own body to where Regina was kneeling before her. She had half a mind to tell the doctor to get back on the bed but there was something about the sight of the powerful, intelligent, strong woman before her in that position that made her bite her tongue. Instead she simply lifted her hips as Regina pulled both her jeans and her underwear down her legs, leaving Emma completely naked.

It was always a little awkward, Emma felt, to reveal her body fully to someone for the first time. But the way Regina was looking at her made her feel like she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Emma didn’t have many body hangups but she had never liked the faint stretch marks carrying Henry had left on her stomach. Regina, however, didn’t seem to care as her fingers trailed teasingly up Emma’s inner thighs, skirting around the apex of her legs, over her hip bones and up the trembling body until she cupped Emma’s breasts, both nipples straining for attention. Regina tweaked both before siding her hands back down the toned stomach and gently pressing Emma’s legs wider as she shuffled forwards on her knees.

As Regina’s tongue trailed through her folds for the first time, Emma’s elbows gave out behind her and she collapsed on the bed with a soft cry. She gripped the sheet as she felt Regina’s hands settle on her hips, stroking the skin softly as her tongue continued to explore Emma’s core. Whether it was because she was a doctor or an experienced lover Emma didn’t know but she realised Regina was truly talented with her tongue. She quickly found Emma’s clit and circled the bundle of nerves, flickering over it again and again before sliding back down between Emma’s folds, drinking in the essence already gathered there. She pushed the stiffened tip of her tongue just inside Emma’s entrance, lapping tenderly as she withdrew before pushing in again, a little deeper.

Emma’s hips canted up to meet the intrusion as Regina’s hand slid down to join in the fun. She moved her tongue back to Emma’s clit as she pushed one finger inside the tight channel. Emma cried out, muffling the sound using her hand for fear of waking Henry. Regina pumped steadily, stretching Emma slowly, wary that it had been a while since Emma had last had sex. Her tongue against the blonde’s clit was enough to relax yet stimulate the young woman, however, and soon she was pushing two fingers in and out, in and out, in and out. Emma’s hips met her thrust for thrust, drawing Regina deeper as her walls clenched delectably around the fingers sending her towards her peak.

Perhaps she should have been embarrassed at how quickly Regina managed to make her come but Emma was so overwhelmed with feelings and emotions that she didn’t care. Her scream into the pillow she had grabbed at the last moment made Regina’s own core clench wantonly as the blonde’s body jerked and shuddered through her release. Regina’s mouth and fingers worked relentlessly, her fingers still inside the blonde and her mouth sucking hard on her clit. Only when Emma’s whimpered ‘enough’ sounded from above her did Regina pull back. She admired the smooth, hairless, glistening cunt before her, unable to resist ducking back and lapping up some of the essence which had trickled from inside her girlfriend, the taste sharp and tangy and utterly addictive. Emma’s body trembled at the repeated stimulation but she didn’t say anything as Regina’s tongue roamed gently, lovingly over her flesh, cleaning up as much as she could.

When she got to her feet, Regina hooked her fingers into her thong and pulled it down her legs before climbing onto the bed beside the spent blonde. She lay down beside Emma who rolled instantly towards her, their bodies connected once more. Regina kissed the woman gently, her lips still wet with Emma’s come but the blonde didn’t mind. In fact she opened her mouth to welcome
Regina’s tongue, her own flavour mixed with Regina’s in delicious, heady perfection.

“Wow,” she breathed when they broke apart.

“Glad we didn’t wait longer?”

“God, yes,” Emma laughed.

And it was true. She knew that what she and Regina were doing had just gotten a lot more serious and intense but she also knew, and felt, that what was between the two of them was far more powerful than anything she had experienced before. Not because of the incredible orgasm her girlfriend had drawn from her body in mere minutes but because of the way the woman had tenderly, reverently and, dare she think it, lovingly touched the blonde. And now it was Emma’s turn to repay the favour.

She rolled on top of Regina, her hot, wet core slick against the brunette’s stomach. Regina groaned at the sensation as Emma’s weight pressed tantalisingly above her. The time she had spent between the blonde’s legs had left her incredibly aroused and her body ached for the touch of the woman now nuzzling into her neck. The soft sucking kisses descended and Regina shifted herself on the bed so her head lay on Emma’s pillows. While she hadn’t minded kneeling on the floor, she wasn’t going to expect Emma to do the same and positioned herself in the middle of the bed just as Emma’s mouth covered her left breast, the right being squeezed by an eager hand.

But it wasn’t enough. As soon as Emma had lavished each nipple with equal, brief attention, the blonde continued her journey and soon found herself nestled within the cradle of Regina’s thighs. She quickly decided it was her new favourite place in the world as the soft, toned legs curled around her, pulling her forward until her mouth covered Regina’s core. As if it was muscle memory, Emma remembered what to do, how to move, where to go. Her tongue swiped confidently through Regina’s core, the taste exploding her tongue. Her nose nudged Regina’s clit, poking out from beneath its hood. Unable to wait any longer, she trailed her tongue up and finally sucked Regina’s nerve bundle into her mouth. The brunette gasped, her hips rocking towards Emma as the blonde began to tease her mercilessly. With a final, slightly hard nip to her clit, Emma retreated back to Regina’s entrance, a breathy “fuck” filling the room.

The brunette tasted better than anyone she had ever been with, Emma decided as her tongue thrust in and out of Regina’s core. It was spicy and sweet and all kinds of erotic, making Emma’s own centre burn with desire once more. She doubted Regina would object to round two. But first Emma redoubled her efforts to bring Regina to her first climax of the evening. It didn’t take long, either, with Emma’s tongue pumping in and out of Regina’s channel, her nose rubbing deliberately against her clit and her hands having slid up the body above her to tweak and tease the taut nipples.

As she came, Regina’s back arched off the bed, her fingers in Emma’s hair pulling the blonde’s magical mouth even closer to her tender core. She rocked herself against Emma’s face, too far gone to be embarrassed about the animalistic nature of the act and chasing the pleasure Emma was drawing from her body. When she collapsed back to the bed, Emma pulled away from her dripping sex, panting and smiling widely.

“You ok?” she asked as she crawled back up Regina’s body.

The woman was panting, eyes closed and her body limp.

“Fucked,” Regina said. “In a good way.”

“God, it’s so hot when you swear,” Emma said.
She didn’t know why but there was something about the usually composed, professional and eloquent woman swearing that made Emma’s body tingle in delight. Regina let out a breathy laugh at the comment as Emma lay down beside her, throwing her leg over Regina’s hip and snuggling close to her side.

“You bring it out in me,” Regina said, turning her head and lazily opening her eyes.

“I hope to be bringing it out in you many times again in the future,” Emma grinned.

“I don’t doubt that,” Regina replied, also smiling. “But first, can we have some food? You’ve worn me out.”

Emma had forgotten that it was still early. It had been before eight when Regina arrived at the apartment and the two women hadn’t been talking for long before they ended up kissing on the couch. Looking at her bedside clock, Emma realised had just gone nine in the evening.

“Sorry,” Emma said. “I didn’t mean to starve you.”

“Oh I got my fill,” Regina said, stretching out her satiated limbs.

“As did I,” Emma replied. “You’re delicious.”

“So are you, my dear,” Regina said. “And after we have dinner, I know exactly what I’d like for desert.”

Emma’s eyes darkened and she pushed her pelvis forwards, allowing her slick core to come into contact with Regina’s hip. The brunette hissed in delight at the sensual act and kissed Emma hard. It didn’t last long, however, as the sound of Regina’s stomach rumbling echoed through the room.

“Dinner,” she said firmly, sitting up and looking around for her clothes. “And afterwards I want you to sit on my face so I can enjoy my dessert.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: so apparently when there’s smut to write I’m much faster … plus I had the day off work today. Hope you enjoy. No need to be shy when it comes to reviewing!
The room was still dark when Emma’s eyes blinked open. She frowned, unsure what had woken her until she heard a rustling on the far side of the room. She rolled over and saw the pale body moving at the foot of the bed, the slender frame bent over as Regina pulled on her underwear.

“Morning,” she murmured, pulling the sheet over her naked body to keep out the chill of the wintery air.

“Good morning,” Regina said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you but I have to go back to mine for some fresh clothes before I head to work.”

“You can borrow something if it means you get to come back to bed,” Emma said, eyes roving shamelessly over the woman who was now clasping her bra behind her back.

Regina chuckled and shook her head. “Thank you but I really ought to head to mine anyway.”

Emma pouted but nodded her understanding. It sucked that Regina had to go to work on Saturdays but she respected the woman’s chosen career and knew that, much as she would enjoy spending her morning in bed with the brunette, she was going to be far more productive saving lives at the hospital. Plus, Henry would be up soon, she realised as she noticed it was already approaching six thirty.

“Are you coming back tonight?” Emma asked as Regina buttoned her slacks.

“Am I welcome?” she asked teasingly.

“Oh you’re so welcome,” Emma replied at once. “Last night was … amazing.”

She briefly thought back to their time late in the evening, bellies comfortably full of pasta which Emma had microwaved for the two of them before they climbed back into the rumpled sheets and resumed their exploration of one another’s bodies. She didn’t think she’d ever forget the look on Regina’s face when she had come with three of Emma’s fingers buried within her as Emma rubbed herself on Regina’s tensed thigh.

“It really was,” Regina nodded, returning to the bed and crawling onto it, meeting Emma’s eager lips for their first kiss of the morning. “Really amazing,” she added as they broke apart. “And much as I would love to bail from my work and stay here with you and Henry, I can’t.”

“I know,” Emma assured. “Go on, you’re going to be late.”

She gave Regina a final kiss before gently pushing the brunette’s shoulder and encouraging her to finish getting dressed. She watched as Regina pulled on her shirt, then her cardigan and finally her shoes. Once she stood completely dressed in the dark bedroom, Emma swung her own legs out of bed. Her ghostly body moved across the room as she walked to where her dressing gown hung
inside her wardrobe. Before she could put it on, however, she found herself pinned against the wall, Regina’s mouth pressed hard against her own, two hands gripping her waist tightly as the brunette rocked her pelvis into Emma’s.

“Fuck you’re gorgeous,” Regina said when she pulled back, releasing the startled and aroused blonde.

“So are you,” Emma said, chasing the retreating older woman and pulling her into her arms for yet another kiss. This one was softer, gently and full of promise for what was to come.

“I have to go,” Regina breathed when the kiss ended several minutes later. “I’m going to be late for work.”

Emma stepped backwards and held her hands up in mock defence. Regina laughed at the act still enjoying the fact that the blonde was naked. But then Emma finally reached for her dressing gown and shrugged it on. The two of them moved through the empty apartment, opened the door and headed down the hallway. They lingered for the shortest moment at the front door, Regina promising to come over after her shift and Emma asking the brunette to text her if she had any dinner cravings. Then there was a final kiss, two shy smiles and the brunette had disappeared out of the building and into the early morning drizzle.

Henry woke less than ten minutes after Emma had finally donned pyjamas and crawled back beneath the sheets. He pulled himself up onto the bed and snuggled under the covers with his mother. Emma supposed she should be glad he wasn’t demanding much of her energy that morning; she hadn’t exactly gotten much sleep the previous night. But the fact that her six year old son wasn’t bouncing up and down and requesting their traditional Saturday pancakes meant that he was still sick. Emma would have happily done anything her son desired if only it meant he was well again. Soon, she told herself. Soon.

“Mum, where’s Regina?” Henry asked as he curled into her side, his body uncomfortably hot against her.

“She had to go to work,” Emma said. “She’s going to come back later tonight though.”

“Can I stay up and say hi?”

“That depends,” Emma said. “If you’re tired, you’re going to have to go to bed. Remember what Doctor Zelena said?”

“Yeah, I know,” Henry nodded. “But my dad is going to make me better on Monday so it doesn’t really matter, does it?”

Emma bit her lip. She wished Regina hadn’t had to go to work. She didn’t quite know what she should or shouldn’t tell Henry and, to be honest, she didn’t quite understand the upcoming treatment herself.

“Well, we don’t know that for sure, kid,” she said eventually. “Your dad is going to come and try and help but we don’t know it will definitely work. And it’s still really important you’re strong and ready for Monday because Doctor Zelena is going to have to give you some medicine which isn’t going to make you feel well.”

“Why?” Henry asked.

“Because that medicine will make all the nasty stuff in your body go away and then your dad can give you some of his healthy blood and you’re get better.”
Henry looked sceptical. That didn’t sound like a great system to him. Why did he need new blood? Emma correctly read his confusion and disbelief.

“Regina is going to talk to you about it tonight or tomorrow so if you have any questions, I think you should ask her. She’s a special doctor for children so she can explain stuff way better than me.”

“Ok,” Henry said. “Can we do some painting today.”

“Yes,” Emma said. “Are you hungry? I can make pancakes if you like?”

Henry shook her head but sat up and slid out of bed. Emma followed suit and together the Swans trailed slowly into the kitchen. The debris from her late dinner with Regina lay on the side and she quickly washed up as Henry clambered up into his chair at the small dining table in the corner of the room. They rarely ate in the kitchen but Henry often sat there while Emma was making their meals so she could keep an eye on him. That morning he pulled some paper and colouring pens towards him and began crafting … something. Emma had to admit her son didn’t have much artistic ability thus far but diligently stuck each of his creations on the fridge nonetheless.

Twenty minutes later and she put a plate in front of her son with a pancake covered in blueberries and strawberries before him. She hated buying out of season fruit which had accumulated thousands of air miles but if it got nutrition into her son then she was willing to bite the bullet. Henry took a few mouthful under Emma’s gaze but as soon as she turned back to her own lemon and sugar pancake, he pushed the plate away.

“A few more bites, kid,” Emma said as she sat down opposite him.

“I’m not hungry,” Henry said quietly, returning to his drawing.

“Eat the fruit, at least,” Emma bargained.

Henry dutifully reached out and plucked a single blueberry from the plate. Emma sighed but didn’t push him. She knew he already felt terrible and being scolded for not eating when he had no appetite was not going to help. She resigned herself to yet another quiet, low energy day with her son.

Which was exactly as it went. With the addition of Ruby who turned up after lunch with a selection of books and games for Henry. They played together in the living room floor for an hour until Henry fell asleep and Emma carried him to his room. Emma and Ruby then sat on the couch and Emma explained as much as she could about the upcoming bone marrow transplant and what was in store for Henry. Ruby had more complex questions than Henry and Emma found herself wishing Regina was there to answer them again.

“And Neal? What’s his plan?” Ruby asked.

“He arrives tomorrow afternoon,” Emma said.

“Shit,” Ruby breathed out. “Talk about having a lot on your plate. Henry’s sick and then he’s meeting his dad for the first time. New relationship with Regina to boot. How’s that going by the way?”

Emma couldn’t help but smile. “Great,” she admitted. “It’s all great.”

“You’ve slept with her,” Ruby said at once. “Tell me everything.”
And Emma did, only stopping when they were interrupted by Henry waking from his nap over an hour later and asking if his favourite doctor was here yet. Ruby looked between the two of them and remarked that she wasn’t sure who was more lovestruck. Emma punched her friend on the arm and stood from the sofa to get her son a glass of milk.

Soon after four, a text from Regina informed Emma that if it wasn’t too much trouble she was thinking a vegetable stir fry would be good for dinner. That was, she added, if Henry liked it. Emma smiled dopily at the concern in her girlfriend’s text and asked Ruby to look after Henry while she nipped down to the local shop to get the additional ingredients she needed. As luck would have it, Henry also loved Emma’s stir fry. They had the meal at least once a week, in fact. Regina seemed to fit just perfectly into their lives, Emma mused as she bought the egg noodles and some beansprouts to supplement the vegetable she already had at home.

Whether it was because he wasn’t hungry or because he really was determined to stay up to see his favourite doctor, Emma didn’t know but Henry adamantly refused to let Emma cook his dinner early. It wasn’t until seven that he permitted her to stop playing the boardgames Ruby had brought over and begin cooking. Ruby herself had disappeared an hour earlier, heading on a night out with some of their other friends. Emma didn’t feel like she was missing out. The only thing she was missing was Regina’s presence. She had just turned the heat under the wok down low when her phone vibrated in her pocket, informing her the brunette had arrived. Deciding not to leave Henry alone in the apartment with an open flame, she hoisted his slender frame onto her hip and carried him downstairs.

“Hi Gina!” Henry shouted even before Emma had opened the front door.

“Hello Henry,” the brunette mouthed back before repeating it once the door had swung inwards. “How are you this afternoon?”

“Mum made stir fry for me and you,” Henry said.

“Did she now?” Regina said, smiling softly at Emma. “How kind of her.”

“Come on up,” Emma said, closing the door against the dark London night and leading the way back to the apartment.

She left Henry on the sofa and made her way to the kitchen. Regina, however, sat down beside the small boy who was sorting through a pack of cards.

“What are they?”

“Top Trumps,” Henry said, showing them to the brunette briefly as he gathered them together. “Can we play?”

“Sure,” Regina said. She curled her legs beneath her on the couch and waited patiently as the young boy clumsily dealt out the cards. Emma’s head appeared around the doorframe at one point to see where the brunette had gotten to but she just smiled at the sight that greeted her and disappeared to put the finishing touches to their meal.

Less than five minutes she returned to the living room and placed the three plates she was carrying on the already laid table.

“Henry, wash your hands please,” she called before disappearing to get the bottle of wine which had been chilling in the fridge. By the time she came back with two glasses and a juice for Henry, the boy and Regina were emerging from the bathroom. She helped her son into his chair, poured
wine for her and Regina and finally took her seat.

“Wow, this looks and smells amazing,” Regina said. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Emma replied. “How was your day?”

“Long but good,” Regina said. “There are always a lot of kids admitted at the weekend but there were no serious incidents in our department. Everyone was pretty much ready to go home by the time I left.”

“Because you’re an amazing doctor,” Emma grinned.

“Because most of the cases were simple and easy to treat,” Regina amended. “But thank you.”

“Gina, Mum said my dad is going to give me some good blood and that Doctor Lena is going to give me nasty medicine to make my bad blood go away,” Henry piped up.

Emma shot a look at Regina which said ‘I had no idea what to tell him!’ Regina understood. Talking to children about their upcoming treatment was a hard part of the job and one she had trained for years to perfect.

“Yes, that’s true,” Regina said, putting down her fork. The food was delicious but she didn’t want to be discussing blood transplants while eating. “There is a part of your body which is making some blood which makes you feel sick. We need to give you some medicine so that stops happening and then we can give you some healthy blood from your dad and hopefully you’ll get better.”

“So on Monday I’ll be all better again?” Henry asked, perking up at the thought.

“No exactly,” Regina admitted. “We need to talk to your dad for a bit and take some of his blood to do some tests. If his blood really is good then we are going to give you this medicine to stop your body making the bad blood. But that will take a few days. It might be next weekend when we give you the blood from your dad. And then we’ll give you the blood over three or four days. It could be a few weeks before you come home though. Your body will be very tired and we need to make sure you don’t get sick.”

“But I’m already sick,” Henry frowned. “I can get sicker?”

“You could,” Regina nodded. “But Doctor Zelena and I and everyone at the hospital are going to work really hard to keep you healthy and well. We’re just going to have to take it a day at a time.”

“Oh.”

Emma and Regina exchanged glances. It seemed that perhaps, for the first time, Henry was realising quite how sick he was and that the doctors didn’t have a magical cure for him. For the first time in his life, his mother was unable to make everything alright for him. In fact, she needed his mysterious father to help her. And Doctor Regina and Doctor Zelena.

“You’re going to be fine, kid,” Emma said, blinking back tears. “I’m going to be right beside you every step of the way, ok?”

Henry nodded and pushed away his food. He’d eaten about half of it which in Emma’s head was a victory anyway. Regina understood; she’d lost her appetite too.

“May I get down?” Henry asked.
Emma nodded, not trusting herself to speak. The little body climbed from his chair and padded across the carpet to the sofa where he buried himself beneath his duvet. Emma suspected he was crying. She turned back to Regina with tears shining in her eyes. The brunette wiped evidence of her own sadness away. Emma needed her to be strong. She couldn’t become emotionally involved in Henry’s treatment. Although she already knew it was way too late for that.

Their dinners abandoned, Emma and Regina returned to the sofa and sat down carefully either side of the mound they knew to be Henry. Emma put her arm around him and shuffled his body closer. After a moment, his face appeared, hot and teary as he looked up at his mother.

“I want to be well again,” he said quietly.

“I want that too, baby,” Emma said, lifting her son onto her lap.

She wrapped him up in her arms, kissing his fiery cheek and rocking him softly. She glanced at Regina, heartbroken at the fact that her son had finally realised how sick he was. The doctor looked sympathetically back, knowing there was nothing she could say to make either Emma nor her son feel better. The fact was that until Neal arrived in the city and they began the treatment, all any of them could do was wait. She also knew that this wait was going to be the longest, most stressful and most nerve-wracking of Emma’s life. She was just pleased the blonde had allowed her to be in her life in some way to support her. She might be a doctor and she was going to do her damnedest to treat Henry effectively but she knew Emma needed her emotionally as well. Putting on a brave face for Henry was one thing but out of view of her son, Emma was going to need someone supporting her. Regina hoped that would be her.

And it was. Once Henry was put to bed an hour later, face no longer teary but not smiling either, Emma fell into Regina’s arms, sobbing hard. The two collapsed on the sofa, Regina holding Emma close to her and stroking her hair as the blonde let out her emotions. Henry couldn’t see how scared his mother was about his upcoming treatment but Regina could. Regina was the one person who not only knew what Emma was going through but was able to offer her professional support herself. Emma felt some comfort in the knowledge that Henry would be treated by two of the best paediatric doctors in the country. Regina, on the other hand, was terrified at the thought. Of course she wanted to help Zelena during Henry’s upcoming treatment and had already cleared her observation of the procedures with the department. But that also meant she was now responsible for Henry, for his health, for his life. Emma was putting her trust in Regina and her medical abilities, something parents did every day when they arrived at the hospital. But this was different. This was Emma. With Henry, there was more at stake. The boy’s health was, of course, far more important than their blossoming relationship but Regina also knew they were intrinsically linked. If, she shuddered at the thought, Henry’s treatment was unsuccessful, she knew their relationship would be over. Emma would associate her with her sick son. Would she blame her? Resent her? Hate her? Regina was determined it wouldn’t come to that. She was determined that Henry would battle this. He would receive the transplant, get better, be healthy once more. He had to. He had to survive.

That night, the women held one another in the darkness of Emma’s room. It was intimate but not sexual. Just a simple need to be close, to feel one another, to be supported. The sounds of London lulled them to sleep, their dreams plagued with their own, real life fears.

Sunday was likely to be Henry’s last day in his own home for a long time. He’d come back eventually, Emma told herself as she made him breakfast, but it was going to be a while until he was released from hospital after the transplant. Assuming it went ahead, of course.

Although the day was cold and grey, Emma suggested they go out to the park. Regina had assured
her Henry was well enough to go out and she wanted him to get some fresh air before he became cooped up in a hospital room for weeks on end. They bundled into their coats after lunch and headed down to the park. It wasn’t long before Henry asked Emma to carry him, his energy levels still low. The trio weren’t the only group to venture out to the playground but Emma found a free swing, placed Henry on it and made sure he was holding tightly before she began to push him. He managed a small smile as he swung through the air and even waved at Regina who was taking a few photographs. Emma tried not to think about how many more photo opportunities she may have with her son.

It didn’t take long for Henry to complain of being cold, despite his fever making his body burn up. Emma hoisted him onto her hip again, ignoring the lightness to her son’s body, and they set off home. A couple of parents Emma recognised waved at her, smiling sympathetically. Word had clearly got around Henry’s school that he was sick. She waved politely back before taking Regina’s hand and leading the way out of the playground. Regina squeezed her fingers reassuringly; she had seen the pitying faces too and knew Emma wanted to get away from them.

“What would you like for dinner, Henry?” Regina asked as they walked back to the apartment.

“I’m not hungry,” came the reply, muffled by the scarf wrapped tightly around his face.

“Well, what’s your favourite ever meal because from tomorrow you’ll be in the hospital and that food isn’t great, is it?” Regina reminded him. “So I thought I could cook you and your mum something extra special tonight.”

“You’re staying at ours again?”

Regina glanced at Emma who gave her a grateful smile. “Yes, I am,” Regina replied. She didn’t have to go to work until Tuesday and was more than happy to be spending every minute she could with Emma and Henry. She knew it was rather intense as far as an early relationship went but she also knew the circumstances weren’t exactly normal. “So, what do you want for dinner?”

“McDonalds?” Henry suggested.

Both women laughed. “How about I make us some special burgers?” Regina suggested. “I promise you they’ll be even better than McDonalds and far healthier.”

“Ok,” Henry said.

The walk home wasn’t long but Henry fell asleep before they arrived. Just as they reached the apartment, Emma’s phone rang. She gestured for Regina to fish it out of her back pocket as she opened the door with her keys, trying not to wake her son.

“Go ahead and answer,” Emma said.

Regina nodded, looked at the screen and faltered as she read the called ID. “Oh, it’s Neal.”

“It’s ok, answer,” Emma assured her.

The brunette obliged. “Hello.”

“Emma?”

“No, it’s Regina, her friend.”

“Oh the chick from Cardiff, right?”
“Yes,” Regina said as she followed Emma inside. “How are you?”

“Could be better,” came the reply. “My hotel messed up my booking and they’re full tonight. Is Emma there?”

“Yes, hold on, she’s just putting Henry to bed,” Regina said as they entered the apartment. Emma looked quizzically at her girlfriend who shrugged and held out the phone. Emma nodded and disappeared into Henry’s bedroom, emerging seconds later and reaching for her mobile.

“Hi Neal, sorry about that. What’s up?”

“My hotel made a mistake and they’re fully booked,” Neal repeated. “I was wondering if it would be alright if I crashed with you for tonight? I’ll find somewhere else tomorrow but I’m too exhausted right now.”

“Stay here?”

Regina’s head reappeared around the kitchen doorframe at those words from where she had been checking the fridge to see what ingredients she’d need for Henry’s requested burgers.

“Yeah, is that ok?” Neal asked.

Emma glanced at Regina who was wearing a curious expression on her face. Emma shrugged and shot her an apologetic look before answering.

“Sure, it’s the least we can do after everything you’re doing for Henry. I’ll text you the address.”

“Thanks, I’ll see you in a bit,” Neal said.

Emma said her goodbyes and hung up the phone. Regina was still stood in the doorway, looking at the blonde.

“Neal’s staying here tonight,” Emma stated. “His hotel messed up or something.” She sank onto the sofa. “Shit, Henry’s about to meet his dad.” Should she prepare him? Henry knew Neal was coming to London for the tests the following morning but what would her son think when he woke up to discover his dad in his living room.

Regina appeared in front of her seconds later. “He’s staying here? With you and Henry?”

“For a night, yeah,” Emma nodded. “Is … are you ok with that?”

“Of course,” Regina replied at once. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

Emma said nothing. She recognised jealousy when she saw it but decided to avoid an argument.

“I want you to stay here tonight as well,” Emma said.

“I think you guys might need some time alone to talk,” Regina said, the words spilling from her lips before she could stop them.

“Then stay for dinner at least,” Emma said.

“I promised Henry I would make him burgers so of course. I’ll go and get ingredients now; enough for four people.”

Emma reached into her purse for some money but Regina shook her head, insisting she was happy
to pay. She was more than happy to pay for Emma and Henry’s food but the fact that she’d be cooking for Neal sat far less happily with her. She kissed Emma lightly before she headed out of the apartment, hoping the walk to the local shop would give her enough time to clear her head. Emma needed her, she reminded herself. She doesn’t need someone with jealousy issues. And anyway, Emma was gay, Regina mentally scolded herself. She wasn’t interested in Neal. Sure they had history, they shared a son, Neal was able to save their son. But Emma didn’t want any more from the man. She wanted Regina. Emma had told her as much on Friday night. There was no need to be jealous, Regina told herself firmly as she strolled down the aisle looking for minced beef.

Back at the apartment, Emma’s phone rang just as she was finishing tidying up the living room.

“Hey, I’m here.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: this story will have a happy ending … But I like the drama along the way. What do you guys think of Neal rocking up?
He was stood outside, huddled near the wall and looking out over the damp street. It had started to rain. Emma saw the dark sky beyond him through the window and hurried forwards to open the door. It was awkward, hesitant. What was the correct way to great a long-forgotten one night stand who got you pregnant and then agreed to save the life of the son you shared? Emma sure as hell didn’t know. They settled for a mutual ‘hello’ in the end. Neal followed her wordlessly upstairs but just before they reentered the flat, Emma turned around.

“Henry’s asleep,” Emma said. “He doesn’t know you’re coming over.”

“Ok,” Neal said slowly. “But he knows I’m coming to London, right?”

“Yeah, he’s really excited to meet you,” Emma admitted. It was true; Henry did want to meet his father. She just didn’t know how he was going to react waking up and discovering Neal in his living room. The hospital tomorrow was one thing but this was their apartment, their home.

“I wanna meet him too,” Neal said.

Emma felt a pang of guilt again at being the reason the man stood before her had never met his own son. And guilt also at the fact that Henry didn’t know his father. It was going to change imminently but they’d both still missed out on six years.

“Come on in,” she said eventually, opening the door and leading the way inside.

Neal glanced around the room as he entered, taking in the neat space. The flat was homely enough and certainly nicer than the place he shared in Cardiff. Rent was cheap but he was definitely still living like a student. Perhaps it was time to upgrade, he mused.

“Nice digs,” Neal said, slinging the duffel bag he was carrying down onto the floor. “Thanks for letting me stay.”

“No problem,” Emma said. “It’s the least we could do, really. What happened with the hotel?”

“I dunno,” Neal shrugged. “I thought I’d booked online but they didn’t have any record of it. It was only a tiny little place, round the back of the station so I guess it’s popular with people travelling through. Anyway, it was full. I guess I could have looked for another but -”

“No, it’s fine,” Emma interrupted. “I probably should have offered for you to stay here in the first place. Although I’m afraid you’ll have to make do with the sofa bed. Is that ok?”

“Fine by me,” Neal said. “How long do you think the little guy will be asleep?”

“Not sure,” Emma said, gesturing for Neal to follow her into the kitchen where she flicked on the kettle and began to make them some tea. “The glandular fever means he sleeps a lot. We went to the park this afternoon as well so he’ll be pretty tired. I just wanted him to get some fresh air before
we head to the hospital tomorrow.”

Neal nodded his agreement at that and listened patiently as Emma explained the basics of what was going to happen the following morning when they went in. Mostly it was going to be tests for Neal but Henry was already booked into a private room under the assumption that the bone marrow transplant would be scheduled for some time towards the end of the week if everything went to plan. Neal was asking Emma a question about his own procedure when the door to the apartment closed. The two in the kitchen fell silent and seconds later Regina appeared in the doorway with her shopping, dripping wet.

“Hey,” Emma said, taking in her girlfriend’s soggy appearance.

“Hi,” Regina said, wiping her damp face. She had forgotten her umbrella and was wishing she didn’t look so bedraggled in front of Neal.

“Regina, right? The doctor?” Neal asked, standing up a little straighter and reaching over to shake Regina’s hand.

“Yes, hello again,” Regina said, grasping the hand briefly before placing the keys Emma had lent her on the side and moving to the fridge to unpack the food.

Neal looked a little confused as he watched. “Henry needs house calls and a personal chef?”

“Not exactly,” Emma said. “Regina and I are together, actually.”

There was a pause and then; “is that ethical?”

“I’m not his doctor now,” Regina said, the door of the fridge snapping shut. “Or do you mean two women being in a relationship?”

“No, no,” Neal said, hands up in mock surrender. “Totally fine with the whole lesbian thing. Not in a creepy way though.”

Emma narrowed her eyes slightly and moved to stand beside Regina, needing to be closer to her for some reason. “I met Regina when Henry first went into hospital,” she explained, needing to tell Neal the truth. “And after he was assigned his own paediatrician, we started dating.”

“No sweat,” Neal shrugged. “I’m not going to report you to the board of ethics or whatever. But you are a doctor, right?”

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “A paediatrician. I was in A and E the day Emma brought Henry in. My colleague is now his doctor but I like to keep up to date on his progress.”

“And how is he?”

Regina couldn’t help but be touched by the note of concern in the man’s voice. He hadn’t even met Henry yet and already Regina could tell that the fact that his son was sick was difficult for Neal. She glanced at Emma, who nodded, before answering.

“He’s weak,” she admitted. “The glandular fever means he’s lost his appetite and his body isn’t getting the nutrients it needs to counteract the XLP. The sooner the transplant happens, the better.”

“That’s why I’m here,” Neal said. “I really hope tomorrow all goes well and we can start asap.”

“Me too,” Emma said, moving to pass Regina her tea and then leading the group out into the living
room. “The sooner we start the transplant the better. Before -” She stopped. She still couldn’t bring herself to say the ‘c’ word in association with her son.

“Before what?” Neal frowned.

“Henry is at risk of developing cancerous cells,” Regina supplied. “The bone marrow is the source of the XLP so leukaemia is a high possibility. The sooner we can get some of your healthy cells into Henry, the less likely he is to develop cancer, however.”

“Cancer? Shit,” Neal murmured. “My mum died from cancer when I was a kid. Horrible disease. No kid should go through that.”

Emma and Regina looked at one another. They hadn’t spoken about what they had expected when it came to Neal as a person but Regina’s brief interaction with the man in Cardiff hadn’t shown him in the best light. And Emma … well, she supposed she had seen something she liked in him almost seven years ago but she too barely knew him. Before them now, however, sat in Emma’s living room was a man who seemed far more down to earth, sensible and caring than either had expected.

“I’m sorry to hear about your mother,” Emma offered.

“Me too,” Regina said. “But now you’re here and willing to help, we’re in the best position possible to make sure Henry gets better.”

“Willing to help?” Neal repeated. “You thought I wouldn’t?”

“I wasn’t sure,” Emma admitted. “I mean, I kept your son from you. I didn’t tell you I was pregnant. Why should you help me?”

“I’m helping Henry,” Neal said simply. “I told you before. I’m not going to sit by while my son dies. And as I said on the phone, I was a kid myself back then. You did a far better job raising him than I would have done. I think I would have been more of a hindrance than a help to be honest. Plus, I think we all know we were never going to be a happy family unit.” He looked pointedly between the two women.

Emma and Regina both laughed. They couldn’t help themselves. Neal was being so galant about everything. He was so accepting of the fact that Emma hadn’t told him, dismissive of her apologies and insistent that she had nothing to feel bad about. He was here to help Henry now and that was all that mattered. Emma still felt bad about keeping father and son apart for so long but perhaps now would be the time to remedy that.

“I’ll go and wake Henry. Regina, could you tell Neal a bit about his part in the transplant? He asked me just before you got back and I didn’t really have an answer. You’re the doctor, after all.”

Regina chuckled and nodded. Emma grinned and kissed the brunette lightly on the cheek before getting up from the sofa and crossing to her son’s bedroom door.

It was dark inside the room as Emma stepped inside. Henry was still asleep but she knew she ought to wake him and tell him about Neal before he emerged into the living room. Some preparation was needed ahead of meeting your father for the first time, right? She sat carefully on the edge of his bed and brushed some hair away from his damp forehead. Where to start? What to say? How to explain? She wanted to tell Henry everything but didn’t know how much he already knew about why Neal was here nor what questions he might have for her. Neal may have forgiven her for the six years they spent apart but would Henry? Did she have a right to ask for his forgiveness? The wave of guilt washed over her again.
She leaned over and gently woke Henry up, smiling as he opened his groggy eyes and focused on the shadowy figure before him.

“Mum?”

“Hi baby,” she murmured, flicking on the bedside light. “Did you sleep well?”

“Is it dinner time?” he asked. “Did Regina cook burgers for me?”

“Not yet,” Emma said. “But there’s someone here to see you.”

“Who?”

“Your dad.”

Henry blinked several times and struggled to sit up straighter in his bed. Emma watched the news sink in. “My dad?”

“Yeah,” Emma nodded. “You know how he was going to meet us at the hospital tomorrow?”

Henry nodded. “Well, the hotel made a mistake and he doesn’t have anywhere to sleep. So I invited him to stay here with us.”

“He’s staying here?”

“Just for a night,” Emma said. “We’re going to the hospital tomorrow morning anyway and he can come with us. I just wanted to tell you he was here before you saw him in case you have any more questions for me.”

“What about Gina?”

“What about her?” Emma frowned.

“Is she here too?”

“Yes,” Emma nodded. “She’s talking to your dad right now about what’s going to happen tomorrow. Remember how Doctor Zelena explained everything to you? Regina is doing that for Neal.”

“Oh, ok,” Henry said slowly. “So Gina is staying too?”

“Well, I’m not sure,” Emma said.

“I want Gina to stay as well,” Henry said firmly.

Emma couldn’t help but feel a flicker of happiness at how much his son liked her girlfriend. “Why don’t you tell her that? I already invited her to stay but maybe she’d like you to invite her too.”

“So you and Gina will stay and … do I call him Dad or Neal?” Henry asked, his little face suddenly confused.

“You can call him whatever you want to call him,” Emma said. “He is your dad because you share the same blood, remember? But I know you’ve never met him before and he hasn’t been in your life so if you don’t feel like you want to call him Dad yet, that’s ok too.”

“His name is Neal?”
“Yes,” Emma nodded. “Regina and I will call him Neal.”

“And I will too,” Henry said with an air of finality far beyond his six years.

“Hey, kid. You know I didn’t mean for you to grow up without a dad, right? I didn’t try keep you away from Neal, I just … didn’t know where he was.”

“He went missing?”

“Kinda,” Emma nodded. “But I also didn’t go and find him and I’m sorry about that. I know you’ve wanted to know who you dad is all your life and I wasn’t able to tell you anything much apart from his name. I hope you understand that I tried my best to look after you even without your dad.”

“You did look after me,” Henry said. “I like living with just you. It’s fun.”

“We do have fun,” Emma chuckled.

“Loads of fun,” Henry nodded. “It’s fun with Auntie Ruby too and Grandma and Grandpa. I had fun with Lily too, I think, but I can’t really remember because I was only little. But I know I like it best when it’s just me and you.”

Emma felt her eyes burn with tears. She pulled Henry towards her and wrapped him up in her arms. He didn’t protest either, just hugged her back. Emma knew how he felt. She loved socialising, loved her friends, loved her work and her colleagues. She loved spending time with Regina too. But there was something about the time she spent when it was just her and Henry that was simply magical. She had shared him with others during her life, namely Lily, but when it was the two of them, Emma just felt blissfully happy. Whether they were hanging out at home, walking to school, going on holiday, enduring a dentist trip, whatever it was, every second Emma spent with her son was a treasured moment. Always had been. And now, hopefully, thanks to Neal, they had many more moments together to come.

Eventually Henry began to squirm and pulled back from his mother’s embrace. She quickly wiped her face as he was sliding from the bed and stood to help him get dressed again. Just before he reached the door of his bedroom, Henry paused.

“Ready, kid?” Emma asked.

“Yeah,” Henry breathed out. “I want to meet Neal.”
Chapter Notes

A/N: Firstly, I published an instalment last week but notifications from fanfic were down so please check you have read the last chapter (Neal arrives at the flat). Secondly, I published a Missed Moments with the same words after Jen’s announcement on Monday and I’m repeating them here. I will personally continue to watch Once until Lana is no longer in the show.

In light of the announcement made by Jennifer Morrison regarding her discontinued contract with Once Upon A Time, I will pledge for you, here and now, that I will continue to write SwanQueen fan fiction. These two women inspired me to write in the first place, they inspired me to recognise a true, complex, messy and utterly unbreakable connection between two individuals, they showed me what it meant to be a parent, to be a friend, to be a partner (Lana’s word, not mine). Emma Swan may be leaving the show but the Emma we loved had faded from our screens long ago. Do not believe for a second, however, that she will be eclipsed from the creative minds of those who turn to SwanQueen for inspiration. She will live on, Regina too, forever immortalised in the rhythmic tapping of our fingers and the loyal readers who enjoy our crafts. Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Any questions?” Regina asked after she had finished explaining the bone marrow donation procedure to Neal.

“No, you pretty much answered them all,” he said, glancing over his shoulder towards the door through which Emma had disappeared ten minutes earlier.

Regina watched him, wondering how it felt to meet your son for the first time. And not as a baby. She suddenly felt bad for her wave of jealousy. There was no reason to suspect Neal was there for anything other than to get to know his son. Emma was clearly not interested in him so Regina had no reason to feel threatened. True, the two of them shared something incredibly special. But Neal was here to meet Henry, not reconnect with Emma.

“What’s he like?”

“Who?” Regina asked, snapping back to the present.

“Henry,” Neal said quietly.

“Oh. He’s amazing,” Regina said with a gentle smile. “He’s a sweet little kid and a really lovely child. I have only known him when he’s been sick but Emma tells me he loves to play in the park with his friends and he’s a great little striker when they kick a football around. He loves art too. Emma’s fridge is covered in his drawings. I suspect he’ll be doing a lot of them in the hospital over the next few weeks too.”

“Maybe I’ll get one to put on my fridge,” Neal mused.
“I’m sure you will,” Regina replied. “He really is looking forward to meeting you. He has asked me several questions about you as well as Emma.”

“I want to meet him too,” Neal said, looking longingly at the still closed door. “But it’s kind of scary, you know?”

“I can imagine,” Regina nodded. “Don’t worry, I’m sure it will go fine. But if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to take a quick shower and warm up after that downpour I got caught in. I’m sure Emma and Henry will be out soon.”

Neal acknowledged the dismissal, thinking that Regina was probably trying to give him, Emma and Henry some space as well as actually needing a shower. She disappeared into what he presumed was Emma’s bedroom and emerged quickly with a towel, an oversized hoodie and some tracksuit bottoms. She offered him a final reassuring smile before disappearing into the apartment’s only bathroom.

Flopping back on the sofa, Neal ran his hands over his face and scratched his stubble. Maybe he should have shaved, he thought to himself. What if Henry didn’t like his beard? Neal couldn’t remember feeling as nervous as he did in that moment. Mere metres away from him was his son. A boy he had never met, didn’t even know existed for the first six years of his life and now was desperately ill with a disease he still couldn’t remember the name of, couldn’t pronounce and didn’t really understand. All Neal knew was that he felt an innate desire to save his son. Paternal instinct, he supposed. He had never thought he would make a good father but it seemed like there was something deep inside within him proving him wrong.

Of course, he could still suck at being a dad. He wasn’t exactly comfortable around children and he had a notorious potty mouth at work. What if he swore in front of Henry? He was clumsy too. What if he was asked to watch Henry and the kid got hurt? What if he hurt him? Accidentally, of course. What if -?

The sound of a door opening interrupted Neal’s spiralling thoughts and he jerked upright on the sofa, looking around and setting eyes on his son for the first time.

Emma edged her way past the small boy who was stood frozen in the doorway. She reached down and took his hand, squeezing softly.

“Henry, come and meet Neal,” she said quietly, glancing up at the man himself as she spoke.

Neal, for his part, was rooted to the spot, unable to tear his eyes away from the little child standing before him. The floppy hair which hung down over Henry’s eyes was the exact shade of brown as his own. The chin was much rounder, yet to be elongated by the hormones of adolescence, and his nose was distinctly Emma’s. But the eyes were identical to his own. The same hazel pigment, the same shape, the same lashes, the same everything.

The boy tripped forward, a slight tug from Emma knocking him off balance but he steadied himself and began to walk towards the stranger sat on the sofa in the middle of the room. Except, Neal wasn’t a stranger. True, Henry didn’t know him as an individual. But he had thought about him, wondered, dreamed, fantasised. Who is my dad? What is my dad like? What does my dad look like? Where is my dad? As Henry rounded the arm of the sofa, two sets of hazel eyes still locked together, those questions finally had answers.

“Hi Henry,” Neal managed to stammer. “I’m Neal. I’m … I’m your dad.”

“Hi,” came the tiny voice.
Emma crouched down beside Henry and put her arm around him. “Henry’s really excited to meet you, aren’t you, Henry?” There was a nod. “But it’s a little bit scary too, right Neal?”

“Oh for sure,” Neal nodded. “I’m terrified.”

“What of?” Henry asked.

“Meeting you,” Neal admitted.

“Am I scary?” Henry said, turning to his mother.

“No, kid, you’re not scary but Neal wants to make a good impression and sometimes, when we meet people who are really important, we can get a bit scared.”

“Oh,” Henry said. “Is that why I’m scared? Because I want to make a good mimmession?”

“Impression,” Emma corrected. “And yes, perhaps. But also, meeting your dad is a pretty massive thing, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Henry nodded, looking back up at Neal from beneath his long lashes. Then he blinked and looked around. “Where’s Gina?”

“Taking a shower,” Neal supplied as Emma suddenly noticed the brunette’s absence as well.

“She got wet in the rain getting the food for us to make dinner,” Emma explained to Henry. “She’ll come out soon. But for now, do you want to go and sit next to Neal and I’ll go and get you some juice?”

Henry nodded his agreement to this plan and climbed up onto the couch beside Neal. Emma smiled at the two of them for a moment, feeling a little weirded out at the two of them looking at her with the exact same expression of mild terror on their faces, and disappeared to the kitchen. Neal watched her go, panic rising inside him, before turning back to Henry who was looking expectantly at him.

“So, your mum tells me you’re sick,” Neal said. What else could he say? He didn’t know anything else about his son.

“Yeah,” Henry nodded. “I have blood that makes me feel ill. But Doctor Lena and Doctor Gina help me.”

“Who’s Doctor Lena?” Neal frowned.

“Doctor Gina’s best friend. She works at the hospital too. But now Emma and Doctor Gina are girlfriends so I get two doctors. Are you here to make me better?”

Thrown by the abrupt question, Neal stammered for a moment before answering. “I … um … well, yes. At least, I want to try and help.”

“Mum says we have to go to the hospital tomorrow for more tests. Are you coming?”

“I am,” Neal nodded. “They have to test my blood to make sure it’s … um, good.”

“And then your good blood will fight my bad blood,” Henry said.

“Something like that,” Neal nodded. “Is that ok with you?”
“Yeah,” Henry replied. “That’s what dads are meant to do, isn’t it? Look after their sons. Do you have any more sons?”

“Not that I know of,” Neal said, wondering for a moment how many of his drunken escapades had resulted in children. How many Henrys were scattered around the UK? He swallowed thickly. “No, you’re the only one, Henry.”

“I’ve never had a dad,” Henry piped up. “I have Mum and I used to have someone else called Lily but I can’t really remember her. And I have Auntie Ruby. And sometimes Uncle Billy takes me to his work and I get to sit on the cool motorbikes. But Mum says I can’t have one yet because I’m too small. Do you have a motorbike?”

“Um, no,” Neal admitted. “I don’t even have a car.”

“We have a yellow car,” Henry informed him. “But it’s a bit old now and sometimes it doesn’t turn on. Mum says she’s a cassick but I think she’s just broken.”

“Classic,” Emma said, catching the tail-end of the conversation as she appeared with a juice for Henry and a beer for Neal. “And she’s not broken, Henry, she’s just a little bit tired sometimes.”

Henry rolled his eyes at his mother before drinking his juice. Once Emma was sat down on the couch, Henry climbed into her lap and settled comfortably in the crook of her legs. Neal wondered whether Henry would ever become so comfortable with him.

“So how long do you have off work?” Emma asked Neal but before he could answer, Henry had his own question.

“What do you do?”

“I work in a university,” Neal said.

“Like a teacher?”

“Not exactly,” Neal admitted. “I work where the students go to have parties and I make sure they are all safe in the night and stop bad things happening.”

“What bad things?”

“So the appointment tomorrow morning is at eight,” Emma said quickly, unsure if Neal was going to start explaining the trials and tribulations of a night club bouncer to a six year old. “We’re going to leave here at seven thirty. Is that ok?”

“Yeah, fine,” Neal nodded. “I’m not really a morning person, though, I’ll warn you.”

Emma laughed. “I can imagine your schedule means you rarely see the day before lunchtime.”

“No but I see my fair share of sunrises on the way home from work in the summer.”

“Do you play football?” Henry said, bored of the adult conversation.

“I do,” Neal nodded. “I play on a team with my work, actually. A group of us goes to the park every weekend and practice. Do you like football?”

Henry’s head wobbled enthusiastically on his shoulders and both Emma and Neal laughed. At that moment, the bathroom door opened and Regina stepped out into the living room. Emma’s eyes drank in her girlfriend. Wet hair hung to her shoulders, dripping slowly onto Emma’s favourite
hoodie. The tracksuit bottoms were also a popular choice. Emma swallowed thickly as her gaze returned to Regina’s face which looked … conflicted.

“Gina!” Henry shouted.

“Hi Henry,” Regina said, the little boy propelling her towards the group on the sofa. “Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah,” Henry nodded. “Are we still having burgers for dinner?”

“Of course,” Regina smiled as she sat down in the armchair.

“Neal, are you having burgers too?” Henry asked his father.

“Um -”

“Yes,” Emma supplied. “Neal is staying here tonight, remember? Regina and I are going to cook for all four of us and then we’re all going to sleep here and go to the hospital together in the morning.”

“Gina, you’re coming to the hospital too?” Henry asked.

“Yes I am. I’m going to help Doctor Zelena get you ready for your healthy blood.”

“From Neal,” Henry stated.

“Hopefully,” Regina nodded. “And then at the end of the week we can start to make you feel better again and soon you’ll be healthy again.”

“No cancer?”

All three adults balked. Emma and Regina knew Henry had been aware of the word being used but didn’t realise he had actually taken it in nor understood the significance of the term. It seemed, however, that he did. Neal, for his part, was shocked to just what an extent Emma was honest with her son about how ill he was.

“Baby, you don’t have cancer now,” Emma reminded him gently. “And we’re going to make sure all that nasty blood inside you is replaced with Neal’s healthy blood before you get cancer, ok?”

“Yeah?” Henry said, sceptically, looking between Regina and Emma as if testing their resolve in his mother’s answer.

“Yes,” Regina nodded. “Now Neal is here, we can make you better.”

Henry looked at Neal, taking in the man sitting awkwardly at the end of the sofa. His dad; his dad was here. His mum and Doctor Gina had found his dad. And now his dad was going to stop him getting cancer. Henry didn’t know what cancer was but he didn’t want it. Every time someone said the word his mum’s green eyes went all glassy and sad. He didn’t want whatever cancer was.

“Thank you,” he said eventually.

“You’re welcome,” Neal replied. “I’m happy to be able to help you get better.”

Henry smiled and turned back to his mother. “Can I watch TV? And when are the burgers going to be ready? I’m hungry.”
Emma scooped Henry off her lap and deposited him on the sofa beside Neal. “Regina and I will go and start right now, kid,” she said, eager to capitalise on his desire to eat. Henry’s appetite never lasted long. “Neal, can you watch Henry while we make dinner?”

“Watch him?” Neal asked. “And do what?”

“Just make sure he doesn’t lick batteries or stick his fingers in the plug sockets,” Emma joked, reaching for Regina’s hand and pulling her up. “If you need anything, we’ll be in the kitchen.”

Neal nodded mutely as the two women walked past him before turning back to his son who was already flicking through the channels on the TV in search of cartoons. Even with Emma a few metres away, Neal was apprehensive about the immense responsibility which had just been bestowed upon him. His knuckles whitened as he gripped the cushion beside him, saying a silent prayer than nothing went wrong in the next half an hour.

As soon as Emma and Regina stepped into the kitchen and out of sight of the living room, the blonde turned around and placed a heated kiss against surprised lips. Regina responded after a moment, arms wrapped around the slender blonde and pulling their bodies flush together.

“You look hot in my clothes,” Emma said when she broke away. “Really hot.”

Regina chuckled. “Thanks. I needed to get out of those wet jeans.”

“And I would have willingly have helped with that task had Henry and Neal not been here,” Emma said. “Sorry about the invasion.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Regina said with a wave of her hand before heading to the fridge to get the ingredients necessary for burgers. “He’s Henry’s father. It’s right he should be here. Plus, you’re not exactly into men so -” She stopped, cheeks burning.

“You were jealous?” Emma said softly, correctly reading the unfinished sentence. “You thought Neal might be coming here to try and get me back?”

“Stupid, right?” Regina said, turning around and shyly meeting Emma’s eyes.

“Cute,” Emma corrected. “I think it’s sweet that you’re jealous of him even though it’s entirely unwarranted. You’re right, I’m not at all interested in Neal. We may have spent a night together almost seven years ago but that doesn’t mean I am in any way looking to get back with him. Why would I want to do that when I’m with the most amazing woman in the world?”


“You’re welcome,” Emma smiled, kissing Regina again. “Trust me, you have no reason to worry. Neal is here to start forming a father-son relationship with Henry and there is absolutely no chance of anything else happening.”

“He seems good with him,” Regina said. “Nervous, perhaps, but good.”

“Yeah, he does,” Emma nodded. “I know he thinks he would have been a bad father back when Henry was first born but I’m sure he would have learnt. Thanks to me, he never got the chance.”

“Emma, you have to stop blaming yourself,” Regina scolded. “The past is the past and we can’t change it. You brought them together now and Neal is going to be able to do something amazing for Henry. You need to forgive yourself for whatever you think you did and focus on what’s really important. The fact that Neal is here now and he and Henry are going to get to know each other.”
The blonde sighed. She knew Regina was right and logical in her reasoning but that didn’t stop Emma still feeling somehow responsible for the absence of a father in Henry’s life. She knew her son had never wanted for anything, had been happy and loved and thrived at school. But still …

“Come on,” Regina said as she began rummaging through Emma’s spice selection to season the burger mince. “Let’s make Henry’s first meal with his father a delicious feast.”

Emma joined her girlfriend and they worked side by side, an alarmingly domesticated and yet enjoyable routine developing as the meal began to take shape. Emma periodically poked her head around the door frame to check on Henry. He was sitting where she had left him, eyes glued to the television. Neal was also motionless but his own gaze was trained on his son.

For her part, Regina was trying to believe what she had told Emma and what the blonde had said to her. She knew there was no reason to be jealous of Neal. The man was clearly only here to save Henry’s life and she knew Emma was not remotely interested in beginning a relationship with the father of her son. And yet it still niggled at her. The fact that Emma and Neal shared Henry, shared a forever bond. She knew she and Emma had only been dating a short time and she also knew that their budding relationship was blooming in the most wonderful way. But that didn’t mean she didn’t feel jealous. Emma may have reassured her that there was no need to feel threatened by Neal’s presence but Regina’s rationale which made her such an accomplished doctor was notoriously flakey when it came to relationships. More than one of her past girlfriends had walked out on her after she had failed to get her jealousy issues under control. She really didn’t want that to happen with Emma.

Once the burger mix was ready, Emma slid some oven chips onto a tray and set to work making a salad. Regina took over cooking duty and watched the meat sizzling in the pan. The smell must have wafted through to the living room because Henry appeared in the doorway, a blanket trailing behind him like a cape.

“Is it ready?” he asked, peering up at Emma who was now sat on the counter making a dressing.

“Almost. Are you hungry?”

Henry nodded and began to suck his thumb just as Neal appeared behind him. Emma smiled reassuringly at the man who looked a little nervous as if he wasn’t sure Henry was allowed in a room as dangerous as a kitchen where knives and peelers and hot stoves and ovens lurked ready to cause injury.

“How was Spongebob?”

“What?” Neal asked distractedly.


“Spongebob isn’t stupid,” Henry protested.

Emma just chuckled. She was immensely glad he had outgrown In The Night Garden which had driven her almost to madness but his new obsession wasn’t much better.

“Go and sit at the table, kid, and we’ll be out in two minutes with the food,” Emma said, hoping down to the floor and turning off the oven.

Henry obediently trotted from the room and Neal went to follow him.

“There’s beer in the fridge,” Emma called out. “Help yourself to another one.”
Neal looked like he was reluctant to take his eyes from the small boy now climbing up into his chair but another encouraging smile from Emma made him double back and he opened the fridge door, pulling out three bottles.

“Oh, no thanks,” Regina said. “I don’t drink beer.”

“I’ll get her a wine, it’s fine,” Emma said. “Beer is great for me though.”

Regina tried hard not to think about Neal and Emma drinking beers together seven years ago as she began delicately placing the cooked burgers in the buns Emma had cut and slathered in ketchup. A generous glass of red wine was waved tantalisingly in her peripheral vision and she turned to see a grinning Emma.

“I prefer wine to beer,” she said simply, dropping a kiss to the soft skin of Regina’s cheek before disappearing out of the room with Regina’s drink and the large salad bowl.

Get a grip, Regina thought to herself as she finished the last of the burgers and picked up two plates. As soon as she arrived at the table, Emma began heaping salad onto Henry’s plate although they all doubted he would eat it. She returned to the kitchen for the chips and soon all four of them were sat in front of their burgers.

“Cheers,” Emma offered, holding up her beer bottle. “To you, Neal. Thank you for coming.”

The man blushed slightly and clinked the neck of his bottle against Emma’s before tapping Regina’s raised wine glass and knocking the side of Henry’s plastic juice cup. The boy hadn’t been paying attention. He was already spearing one of the sliced up burger pieces onto his fork and devouring it. Emma was pleased to see him eating with such enthusiasm but doubted it would last. It was something, however, and she smiled at Henry when his big hazel eyes met her own.

It was an odd feeling, sitting around the table with Henry, Neal and Regina. The first meal shared between father and son. The first time the little family had sat down together. Except Neal wasn’t really family, not yet. He was biologically connected and what he was offering to do for Henry was selfless and wonderful and the lifeline the boy needed. But he wasn’t family. He wasn’t Henry’s dad. Not yet.

Throughout the meal, as the conversation flowed surprisingly fluidly, Neal kept glancing at his son, unable to quite believe that he was sat less than a metre away from his own flesh and blood. He was determined not to mess this up. The hospital appointment, the transplant, getting to know Henry. He wanted it, he needed it and he was ready to learn how to be the best father to the sick little boy beside him.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: and in case you skipped over my note at the top, please read, it’s important:

In light of the announcement made by Jennifer Morrison regarding her discontinued contract with Once Upon A Time, I will pledge for you, here and now, that I will continue to write SwanQueen fan fiction. These two women inspired me to write in the first place, they inspired me to recognise a true, complex, messy and utterly unbreakable connection between two individuals, they showed me what it meant to be a parent, to be a friend, to be a partner (Lana’s word, not mine). Emma Swan may be
leaving the show but the Emma we loved had faded from our screens long ago. Do not believe for a second, however, that she will be eclipsed from the creative minds of those who turn to SwanQueen for inspiration. She will live on, Regina too, forever immortalised in the rhythmic tapping of our fingers and the loyal readers who enjoy our crafts. Thank you.
The Treatment Begins

Chapter Notes

A/N: for those of you who don’t like reading about sick kids, sorry! And just a reminder that all of my stories have happy endings … eventually.

Emma put Henry to bed not long after dinner when exhaustion overwhelmed him. The excitement and anticipation of meeting his father, spending time with Regina and Emma in the park earlier that day and, subconsciously, worry about what was to come tomorrow. Once he was asleep, Emma, Regina and Neal chatted together in the living room. The talk mostly centred around Henry, the one thing they all had in common. Neal wanted to know everything; all the milestones, the events, the memories of his son he would only be able to access through Emma. Regina sat and listened, learning about Henry at the same time and imagining her girlfriend raising her son alone. She knew Emma had done an amazing job and all of the stories which were being told were happy, but she also knew it was an incredibly hard work and wished the blonde had had someone on whom she could rely herself.

When Neal stifled a yawn soon after eleven, Emma decided it was time for all three of them to turn in. She set up Neal’s bed on the sofa and handed him a clean duvet and two pillows. He thanked her earnestly, apologising for the intrusion again before the two women retreated into Emma’s bedroom. It was only the third time Regina had stayed over but despite the newness and excitement of their relationship, sex was not on the agenda. Even without Neal sleeping in the next room, both women were too preoccupied with tomorrow to be interested in sex.

“It will all go alright tomorrow, won’t it?” Emma asked into the darkness, curled up into Regina’s side.

“I hope so,” Regina replied. She couldn’t give Emma the reassurance the blonde craved because she herself didn’t know what was going to happen. She knew the tests Neal and Henry were due to have were crucial and she sincerely prayed everything would work out perfectly and that Neal would be a match for his son. But she couldn’t promise Emma that; no one could.

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Let’s not go there,” Regina said, wrapping her arms more tightly around the lithe woman beside her. “We need to stay positive, remember?”

Easier said than done, Emma thought to herself as she felt Regina place a gentle kiss to her forehead and forced herself to close her eyes and try and sleep.

The drive to the hospital was quiet. No one felt much like talking, too consumed in their own thoughts. Neal was crammed into the back of Emma’s bug with Henry, knees pressed uncomfortably into the rear of Regina’s seat. But he didn’t complain. Not when his own son was about to, hopefully, begin a long and difficult medical procedure.

They arrived at the hospital far too quickly, the imposing building looming ahead of them above the grey London streets. Emma parked and they all climbed out, Henry immediately reaching for
his mother's hand. She squeezed his fingers and set off after Regina who was already walking towards her place of work. They bypassed most of the administrative process, Regina whisking them past the reception area and up to the private room she had secured for Henry the week before. It was in the transplant unit of the hospital and a small lobby split the room from the corridor, in which the four of them scrubbed their hands clean and covered their shoes with plastic boots to avoid contamination. Henry also changed quickly into a hospital robe before entering the room itself. The boy smiled up at the walls where a bright yellow sponge grinned down at him. Emma wondered whether Regina knew Spongebob was Henry’s favourite television show or if the booking had just been fluke. She suspected it hadn’t been and felt a surge of affection for the thoughtful woman.

Just as Emma was filling in some paperwork Belle delivered, Zelena appeared.

“Hello everyone,” she said as she entered. “How are we all doing today?”

“Nervous,” Emma admitted. “Doctor West, this is Neal, Henry’s father.”

Zelena held out her hand to the man who was standing nervously by the window. He shook it with a grim smile. Zelena turned her attention back to the bed where Henry was already sitting, Regina beside him playing a card game. She cocked her head at the domestic sight and raised her eyebrows when her friend at last looked at her. Regina just furrowed her brow and turned back to entertaining Henry.

“What happens first?” Emma asked, handing the clipboard with the completed forms to the doctor.

“I’ll be taking Neal to run some tests,” Zelena said. “I’ve got the lab primed to fast track the results so we should have them back within a couple of hours. While we’re waiting I want to run a few more on Henry, just to make sure everything is as it was last week and there have been no developments.” The word cancer went unsaid. “I also want to run some more advanced tests to confirm his body is strong enough to receive the treatment. If everything goes to plan then we can start the chemo this afternoon. I’d like to perform the treatments in this room to minimise the need to move Henry and the risks which come with that. As he receives the chemo his body will weaken and he will become vulnerable to illnesses so it’s really important this space is kept sterile. Always cover your boots and wash your hands when you enter. Once he begins chemo, we’ll ask you to wear scrubs over your clothes too. Each session will last about 10 minutes and he’ll have one per day until Thursday with the view to beginning the transplant on Saturday.”

“Four days of chemo?” Emma asked.

“It’s necessary,” Zelena replied sadly. “Believe me, if there was any other way around this I would do it but we have to make sure Henry’s XLP cannot continue to produce the infected blood. Chemo is the best option we have.”

“She’s right, Emma,” Regina said softly from the bed. “It’s the only chance he has.”

Emma swallowed thickly. If this was the only chance Henry had, then what would happen if it didn’t work? She forced her mind away from that dark path and turned instead to Neal. “I guess you’re up, then.”

“I guess so,” Neal said, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his jeans and moving towards the door. “Shall we get started.”

“Yes,” Zelena nodded. “Regina, Belle is coming back in a bit to do Henry’s tests. You’re ok to explain everything to Emma?”
“Of course,” Regina assured.

Zelena smiled her thanks and opened the door, standing back so Neal could go first. Emma watched as Henry’s doctor and his father disappeared before turning back to Regina and her son. Henry barely seemed to have noticed that Neal had gone, so fixated was he on the card at the top of his deck. He eventually played it with a triumphant declaration and grinned widely as Regina handed over her own card.

“Henry, are you hungry?” Emma asked, moving to sit down beside the bed.

“No,” Henry replied.

“Are you sure?” Regina asked. “Because once you start the medicine this afternoon you won’t feel very hungry for a long time.”

“I don’t feel hungry now,” Henry reasoned.

Emma and Regina conceded that the boy made a good point. He had hardly had an appetite for days; what difference was chemo going to make? Except both women knew that his appetite wasn’t the only thing which was going to be impacted by the powerful treatment he was due to undergo. But they didn’t push him and instead Emma joined forces with the small boy and by the time Belle arrived, mother and son had just won the game.

The mood sobered as the nurse set about her tasks, chatting to Henry as well as Regina whom she was asking about the upcoming treatment. Belle was only a newly qualified paediatric nurse, graduating just over a year ago. She had seen only one bone marrow transplant before and was keen to know as much about the procedures involved as possible. Of course she asked Zelena as well but the fiery red head was a little less approachable than Regina. Patient as always, understanding the importance of competent nurses when it came to Regina doing her own job, she explained the answer to each question the young nurse asked. She tried to keep the medical jargon to a minimum as well so Emma was able to understand a little more about what was due to happen as well.

At Zelena’s request, Henry was wheeled away to have a CT scan, a chest x-ray and an EKG. She was, Regina explained, making sure they had the most thorough understanding of Henry’s body before the treatment began. Emma was allowed to accompany Henry up to the test rooms but not inside and she watched nervously through the glass windows as unknown doctors operated the machinery focused on her son. They were both relieved to get back to their private room where Regina was waiting for them.

By the time Neal appeared an hour later, Belle had left and Henry was dozing. If he was this tired before the chemo, Emma wondered what he would be like by Saturday. Regina had assured her it was mostly the glandular fever which was making him tired. She didn’t mention that the fact that Henry’s body was already fighting valiantly against an infection meant that his body’s reaction to the chemo would be even more severe than usual patients. She had spoken to Zelena about the risks involved and they had agreed; it was Henry’s only chance. They could not afford to wait until his glandular fever had receded because it could take months for that to happen and the longer they waited, the greater the chance of cancer developing. No, chemo might be risky but not acting immediately was even riskier. At least with a familial match, Henry stood a chance.

“Well?” Emma asked when Neal stepped back into the room.

“Fine,” he said, holding up his arm where a small plaster was stuck over the point from which
Zelena had drawn blood. “She explained everything too. With the bone marrow transplant.”

“Are you opting for leukpheresis or surgery?” Regina asked.

“What or surgery?” Emma frowned.

“They can take my bone marrow directly from my bones through surgery or give me some injections which will make my stem cells go into my blood so we can take them from there, right?” he said, looking questioningly at Regina.

“Correct,” Regina nodded. “Henry needs the healthy stem cells which usually are found inside your bones but we have developed a technique for obtaining them through blood. It makes collection far easier and there is no recovery period like surgery.”

“Is there a difference in the effectiveness of the transplant depending on how it’s collected?” Emma asked.

“No,” Regina replied. “There’s been various studies and most of them simply conclude that leukpheresis is preferred by donors.”

“Yeah, it sounded more appealing to me, to be honest,” Neal said. “Doctor West already gave me my first injection actually.”

“Good choice,” Regina said. “You’ll be ready to donate on Friday then.”

“That’s what she said,” Neal nodded, moving to the side of Henry’s bed and looking down at his sleeping son. “How’s he doing?”

“Belle just finished with the tests,” Emma said. “We’ll have the results soon after yours, I think.”

“So we just wait?” Neal asked.

“Yes,” Emma nodded.

They fell silent, three adults looking down at the small boy, unaware of the immense emotions filling the room, worrying for him and his health, petrified to think about the future, trying desperately to stay positive and failing. They barely spoke again until Zelena entered soon after eleven, a clipboard in her hands and a small smile on her face.

“The tests came back exactly as we wanted them to,” she said to the three adults looking expectantly at her. “Neal is not only a match but a very close one and I’m even more optimistic about the overall success of the transplant now. Henry’s body is far more likely to be receptive to the stem cells because they are so similar to his own.

“But healthy,” Emma prompted.

“Yes, very,” Zelena nodded. “All of your tests came back great, Neal, and we have no reason not to pursue with the treatment as soon as possible. I’ve taken a look at the preliminary results of Henry’s tests too and he’s still clear of cancerous cells. We’re going to start him on chemo this afternoon and depending on how he reacts, we expect him to be ready to receive his new stem cells on Saturday.”

“How long will the transplant on Saturday take?” Emma asked.

“Not too long,” Zelena said. “An hour, maybe. And then we’ll monitor his blood cell closely for
the following two weeks. He’ll need to be in this room the whole time.”

“What now?” Emma asked.

“I need to give him the chemotherapy drugs,” Zelena said. “It involves putting in a central venous catheter into his chest. We’ll use this to deliver the stem cells on Saturday too. I want to give him chemo every day until Thursday and then use Friday as a break before the transplant. This is all provisional though and it does depend on how Henry’s body reacts to the treatment.”

“I understand,” Emma nodded, beckoning Regina closer to her and gripping her hand as soon as she did so. “I know you’re doing what’s best.”

“We are,” Zelena assured her. “I know this is hard but I promise you we are doing everything we can to make this a success. If you do have questions, you can always ask me or Regina. The more informed you are, the better.”

Emma nodded her understanding and felt Regina squeeze her fingers. She was intensely relieved Regina had got permission to be a part of the process. She knew Zelena was an incredible doctor as well but having her girlfriend really understand what she was going through with Henry was an immense comfort.

“I’ll be back in a few hours to begin the chemo. Please ask Belle for anything you need,” Zelena said before leaving the room and allowing the group remaining to digest what they had been told.

Emma had never been close to someone who had undergone chemotherapy before but she knew enough to be apprehensive when Belle and Zelena arrived in Henry’s room that afternoon. All three adults had already donned the sterile suits ahead of the doctor and nurse returning. The young boy was awake, a game of I Spy distracting the group as they waited for the next stage in Henry’s treatment. As soon as the medical staff entered, however, they stopped, a sombre air suddenly falling over all of them.

Regina had explained briefly to Henry what was going to happen and he had understood. Emma was impressed with the the brunette ability to explain complex medical procedures to a child in a way they could comprehend. She supposed it was all part of the training to become a paediatric doctor. It also made her sad that it was necessary in any way to explain such difficult and brutal treatments to children. No child deserved to suffer in the ways Emma knew Henry was about to.

After providing the group with another brief overview of the upcoming procedure, Zelena gently raised Henry from the bed and removed his hospital gown from his shoulders. She then connected him to the heart rate monitor which had been idling in the corner. None of Henry’s tests or scans had given any indication of heart problems but she wanted to be sure they were keeping track of everything which could be affected by the chemo. The clip dwarfed his tiny finger and the monitor showed a beat sped up by nerves but steady. Zelena pushed on, knowing Henry needed them all to stay strong for him. With Emma holding his hand, she delivered the local anaesthetic to his chest. Henry whimpered but said nothing. He just looked up at his mother with wide, pleading eyes. Once done, Zelena set about preparing what she needed to insert the central venous catheter. Emma eyed the large tube apprehensively and saw Henry doing the same thing. She tried to force a reassuring smile but didn’t think she managed it.

Once the area was numb, Zelena made quick work of inserting the PICC line. Emma looked away as she saw the tube pushed into her son’s body. She knew it was being done for his own good but it was still too difficult to watch. Henry’s eyes, however, were glued to the spectacle on his own chest, fascinated with the way the equipment was intruding his body without him feeling anything.
Soon it was securely in place, the dressing around prepared and Zelena getting ready for the next part of the process.

Emma settled herself down in the chair beside Henry’s bed, Neal hovering behind her as Zelena attached the chemotherapy medication. She focused not on the strong chemicals now being pumped into her son’s body but Henry himself, training her eyes on his face rather than the catheter sticking out of his chest. He in turn glanced between the intrusion and his mother, occasionally looking at Neal, Regina and Zelena too before his gaze returned to the tube sticking out of his chest. The anaesthetic was beginning to wear off and the skin was prickling uncomfortably beneath the dressing.

It was only about ten minutes but to Emma it felt like an age. Soon, however, Zelena was clamping the PICC and removing the apparatus used to deliver the chemo before redressing Henry and adjusting the heart rate monitor on his finger. The doctor glanced up at Regina who gave her a small smile and a nod. She knew the worst was yet to come but at least they had started. The first step towards Henry’s recovery had been taken. Zelena tidied away everything she had used and told Emma she’d be back in an hour to check on them. Emma nodded mutely, looking not at the doctor but at Henry who had started to cry.

As soon as Zelena had gone, Emma climbed up onto Henry’s bed and gathered her son gently into her arms, careful not to knock the catheter in his chest. He sniffled against her, breathing in the familiar, comforting scent and closing his eyes as if to block out the hospital room he was in. If he couldn’t see it, perhaps he could make himself believe he was home on the sofa, watching television with his mother after a day at school. And yet the overpowering antiseptic air, the beep of the machine which was clamped to the end of his finger, the tingling burn in his chest and the heavy, weighty feel of his body forced him back to reality. He burrowed closer to Emma and let his tears fall.

The soft snap of the door brought both Swans back to the room. Looking up, they noticed that Neal and Regina had both gone, obviously deciding to give the little family some privacy. Emma appreciated it. She knew Neal was Henry’s father but one day with the boy was not enough for him to develop the intense loving and protective emotions she felt for their son. Emma was petrified, consumed by helplessness and unable to shake off a relentless wave of guilt. After all, she had been the one to carry the XLP gene. If it hadn’t been for her, Henry wouldn’t be sick in the first place. She knew it wasn’t exactly her fault, at least not in a malicious way, but everything which was happening could be traced back to her own biology. Mothers were supposed to protect their children, not make them sick.

“Mum, this tube hurts and I feel strange,” Henry murmured.

“It’s the medicine Doctor Zelena gave you,” Emma explained. “But we have to make sure all of those bad cells inside you stop making you sick. The medicine will stop them growing and then you can have some of your dad’s healthy blood, remember?”

“How long do I have to be sick for?”

The question was so simple, so resigned that Emma felt her heart break.
“We’re trying to make you better as fast as possible,” she said. “Once we start the transplant on Saturday, you’ll have to be in the hospital for a few weeks but every day from then you should start to feel better.”

“A few weeks?” Henry frowned. “But I want to go home.”

“We can’t,” Emma said sadly. “The medicine Doctor Zelena gave you makes your body very weak and you could get sick more easily. We have to keep you somewhere clean and with no other diseases like this room. Remember that special area where we all washed our hands and put these funny bags on our feet?” She wiggled her booted shoes to demonstrate and Henry nodded. “That’s to make sure none of us bring in anything bad from outside which could hurt you.”

“So I have to stay in this room for lots of weeks?”

“Yes,” Emma said. “I’m sorry Henry but we will bring in some toys and games and DVDs and someone will always stay here. Either me or Neal or Regina, ok? We won’t ever leave you alone.”

“I’m scared, Mum,” came the whispered admission after a pause.

“Me too, Henry, me too,” Emma said, holding her son closer to her chest as the tears fell from her eyes.
It was the longest week of Emma’s life. She had barely left the hospital; sleeping in a cot Regina had arranged to have installed in Henry’s room and eating in the canteen. Neal had been present a lot too although he returned to Emma’s apartment to sleep at night. Neither of them even contemplated the man getting a hotel room. There were far more important things in their lives.

As each day of chemo therapy passed, Henry’s body became weaker. He was sick often and an IV drip was periodically attached to his catheter to ensure he was getting enough nutrition as he was barely eating anything. He slept in fits and starts; exhausted but in too much pain and discomfort to really sleep soundly. The chemo made his body achy and sore, his brain slow and sluggish. They gave up playing cards by Wednesday because he was finding it too much effort to concentrate. The television gave him headaches. Mostly Emma and Neal took it in turns to read to him. And when the parents needed a break, Regina stepped in.

Once her own shifts started, Regina was only about to come up and visit Henry in her breaks and after work. Emma insisted she didn’t mind, knowing it was important that Regina was well rested and alert for her own patients. Much as she loved having Regina’s support and her medical knowledge to help her through the week, she also knew Regina had other responsibilities. But it was still nice to see her every day, to hold her close, receive her soft, reassuring kisses.

Friday arrived and everyone was grateful for the rest day Henry would have. The preparatory treatment was brutal and it was important his body recover enough to receive the stem cells the following day. Regina and Zelena both explained the upcoming procedure and reassured Henry that it was not going to hurt and if everything went to plan, he would begin to feel better.

“But I still can’t go home?” Henry asked.

“No,” Regina said sadly. “Not for a few weeks. Not until you’re strong again.”

Resigned to his hospital existence, Henry nodded his understanding and closed his eyes, his tired body succumbing to sleep at once. Emma looked helplessly at Regina who crossed to the other side of the bed to hug the blonde. Lean arms squeezed her back, desperate to feel something other than despair. Emma buried her face in the short brown hair, her tears soaking into it as she wept. She had been crying a lot that week. She tried not to let Henry see but she knew he had. He was aware of the fear his mother, Regina and Neal all felt and although he didn’t quite understand it, he knew it was something to do with the little tube sticking out of his chest.

“Tomorrow will be a new beginning,” Regina said softly when the hug ended. “It will be the turning point we’ve been waiting for and Henry is going to start to get better.”

Emma wasn’t sure if she believed Regina but she desperately wanted to. And she did understand that, medically at least, the hardest part was over. Henry’s body was drained, weak and ready to receive the healthy stem cells from Neal. All that needed to happen now was for his body to accept
the transplanted cells. She didn’t know much about transplants but she knew they were risky and
she also knew they didn’t always work. She hadn’t asked Regina for a percentage. She didn’t want
that sort of figure in her head. Stay positive, was what Regina always said. Emma was trying
valiantly but she wasn’t sure she was succeeding.

That Friday night, she and Neal both stayed in the hospital, a second cot brought in for the man
who was due to donate the following morning. He had been receiving injections every day to
encourage his stem cells into his blood and they hoped to extract them early in the morning and and
prepare the transplant fluids straight away. Regina had asked for the day off and promised to be
there at eight sharp. Aside from Henry, who was knocked out from the chemo, no one else got
much sleep.

When Emma woke from a sleep she had drifted off into barely an hour previous, Neal was already
awake. He was sat on the edge of his bed, staring out of the hospital window where a weak sun
was poking its head above the London skyline. His jaw was set in a firm line and Emma could feel
the nerves radiating from him. She didn’t blame him. After all, the next big step in Henry’s
treatment was all down to him. Not that he had any control over the validity of his stem cells which
Zelena was due to extract in an hour, but still. She knew he was feeling the pressure.

She glanced towards her son and was surprised to see him awake, watching Neal as well. She
offered him a small smile as she sat up and stretched. The movement pulled Neal from his reverie
and he said good morning to the two of them before muttering something about using the bathroom
and disappearing. Emma stood up and made her way to Henry’s bed.

“Morning, kid,” she said. “Are you ready for the big day?”

“Do I have to do anything?” Henry asked. Zelena and Regina had both explained the procedure to
him but he was still unsure exactly how he was going to be receiving his father’s healthy cells.

“Nope,” Emma said, hopping up onto his bed and patting his leg. “It all goes in through the same
tube you’ve been getting your medicine through.” She tapped near the PICC in his chest, careful
not to press too close to the area which Henry had complained was sensitive.

“And then I can go home?”

“We have to wait for a while to make sure it works first, remember?” Emma said. Again, this was
ground they had covered but it seemed Henry regularly asked anyway. Perhaps he was hoping if he
posed the question enough the answer would eventually change. It hadn’t.

Neal in the room and managed to smile at his son. Emma could see the man was stressed however
and hoped they got a moment alone before he went to donate so she could reassure him. She knew
the pressure was on Neal but she also needed him to know that the mere fact that he offered in the
first place and was going to donate was more than she ever deserved to ask of him. Whatever
happened next was not on the man who had been deprived his son for six years.

When Regina arrived, earlier than even she had planned, Emma asked the brunette to stay with
Henry and beckoned Neal to follow her into the corridor. They took two seats a little way from
Henry’s room and Emma turned to the father of her son.

“I just wanted to say good luck, I guess,” she began. “And thank you, for everything.”

“I’ve not really done anything yet,” Neal shrugged. “Still gotta get this stuff out of me and into
Henry. Even then that’ll be all Doctor West’s work, not mine.”
“I know but the fact that you’re donating means so much, Neal, really. I just want you to know how grateful I am to you that you were willing to do this for Henry. Without you, I don’t know what we’d have done.”

“We don’t know it will work yet,” Neal replied, a flash of pain crossing his face.

“We don’t,” Emma conceded. “But we have to be optimistic and believe that it will. He’s in the best hospital with the best doctors and he has his parents with him. Whatever happens, we’re going to get through this together. I just need you to know that I’ll never be able to repay you for what you’re doing for Henry.”

“He’s my son,” Neal replied simply. “I’m glad to do it. I just hope my blood works.”

“I have faith that it will,” Emma said. “Come on, let’s get back in there and spend some time with our son before you have to go off to donate.”

“Our son?”

Emma smiled softly. “Yes, Neal. Our son. I know you weren’t in his life for six years and I’m entirely to blame for that absence. I know you’ve only known Henry for a week but you’ve been incredible with him. He might not be ready to call you ‘dad’ yet and to be honest I understand that. But the fact that you’re here, that you’ve stuck around, that you didn’t run a mile when you found out how sick he really was, that’s what a dad does. They stick with their son through thick and thin. He’s lucky to have you and I’m just sorry you missed out on those first six years.”

“Emma, stop,” Neal said, putting his hands on either of Emma’s shoulders. “Stop apologising. You had absolutely no obligation to find me six years ago and as I’ve said several times, I think I’m actually glad you didn’t. I’d have been a shit father back then. Henry would probably have grown up hating me for being such a flake. Now I’m able to come into his life and be the dad he deserves. And yes I barely know him and this week has been the strangest way to meet my son I could ever have imagined but I still do feel … paternal.”

“Good,” Emma said. “Because Henry thinks you’re great and I really hope you’ll be a part of his life once this nightmare is behind us.”

“You bet,” Neal grinned. “I mean, my work and my home is in Cardiff but I’d love to have some time with Henry scheduled every month. Would that be ok?”

“Of course,” Emma assured him. “Although perhaps we can start planning that after we get through today. I don’t think I can concentrate on working out some kind of shared parenting rota when most of my brain is consumed with the most ridiculous medical jargon I still don’t quite understand.”

“Tell me about it,” Neal chuckled as he stood up. “I was terrible at biology at school. I still don’t understand how those injections I’ve been getting have moved my stem cells out of my bones and into my blood. It doesn’t sound exactly healthy, does it?”

“The wonders of modern medicine,” Emma laughed as they entered the little quarantine area between the corridor and Henry’s private room where they changed into new protective scrub and boots.

When they reentered the room, Henry was sitting up a little, propped against a bank of pillow Regina had arranged for him. The brunette herself was sitting in the chair usually occupied by Emma, reading a book. She looked up at the pair when they entered and wondered what they had
talked about. Henry, she was sure. It had been strange seeing Neal getting to know Henry and reconnect with Emma over the previous week. She had tried as hard as she could not to let her jealousy rear its head but she had to confess she had been less than happy about the fact that Neal and Emma both stayed at the hospital the night before. She didn’t know what she thought was going to happen between them with their incredibly sick son lying metres away but her irrationality had cut through logic. Another aspect of that logic her mind refused to acknowledge was Emma’s sexuality. But she knew Emma really did not need a jealous girlfriend that day.

“How hungry, kid?” Emma asked as she crossed the room.

“No,” Henry replied.

“Belle will be in to put him on an IV in a bit,” Regina said. “He’s going to need to be on it for a couple of hours before the transfusion.”

Before she could say any more, the door to the room opened and Zelena appeared. She smiled at the familiar set of faces who all turned to look at her. It was strange to see Regina sitting beside a patient but she also understood how her friend had become so emotionally involved in the family. They may be advised not to but even she admitted that she was more invested in the outcome of Henry’s treatment than she was with most of her patients. Sometimes it was hard to keep that doctor-patient distance.

“How are we all doing?” Zelena asked as she walked towards the group.

“Nervous, I guess,” Emma said, speaking for all of them.

“Well, you needn’t be,” Zelena said. “I have the very best people on this case and Henry is going to be ready for his transplant before lunch. Once that’s done, we’re on the home stretch.”

She had already briefed Emma about the possible side effects and complications which came with a stem cell transplant and didn’t think it necessary to worry the blonde mother further. They had decided not to tell Henry about the risks, settling on making sure he understood that following the transplant he would be required to stay in hospital for a few weeks to make sure everything went well. He didn’t need to know what might not go well.

“Neal, are you ready?” Zelena asked, turning to the man standing awkwardly by the end of the bed.

“As I’ll ever be,” Neal nodded. He walked towards Henry and bent down, kissing his warm forehead gently. He then turned and, after a slight pause, gave Emma a brief hug. Regina’s eyes narrowed involuntarily.

And then he and Zelena were gone, disappearing from the room into the transplant unit where Neal’s blood would be extracted and processed to retrieve the necessary stem cells. Emma turned back to Regina, pale faced. The brunette gestured the younger woman towards her and patted the vacant chair at her side. With a reassuring smile, Regina continued to read where she had paused earlier, hoping to distract them all while they waited for Neal’s return.

“How are you feeling?” Zelena asked as she glanced at the man beside her.

“Ok,” Neal said, eyes fixated on the tube attached to his body down which his blood was now passing to be collected in bag which fed into an apheresis machine which would separate the stem cells into a second bag before returning the red blood cells to his own body. “Will be enough? For Henry to get better?”
“We hope so,” Zelena nodded.

“And if it isn’t?”

Zelena put down her clipboard on which she had been making notes and offered the man lying on the hospital bed a sad smile. “I know this is really difficult and I know you need statistics and numbers but the best thing we can do for Henry right now is stay positive. This is the best treatment choice for him and if it doesn’t work the first time, we will have the option of trying again in the future. But there’s no reason to suggest this won’t be successful. He’s still cancer-free and his body has held up as well as can be expected to the chemo. You’re donating him stem cells which are an incredibly close match. He’s got a great chance, really.”

Neal nodded and looked back down at the tube, the dark red liquid leaving his body making him feel a little sick. But he knew his son was feeling much worse, lying in a hospital room waiting for his father to give him a lifeline. He just hoped he was able to do it.

The rest of the donation was performed in silence. Neal didn’t feel much like talking and Zelena had always been better at communicating with young patients than adults. Once the machine beeped, letting them know it had taken all of the blood it needed and processed the stem cells out of it, Zelena set about detaching Neal while Belle appeared and took off the extracted stem cells for, Neal presumed, tests.

“Ok, we’ll be back in thirty minutes,” Zelena said, walking Neal to the door of Henry’s room. “Can you pass that onto Emma for me? I want to catch up with Belle and oversee the next step.”

Neal nodded and entered the small holding area where he pulled on a new sterile overall before opening the door to Henry’s room. The boy was asleep but Emma and Regina both turned towards him as soon as they heard the door, Regina climbing off Emma’s lap where, it seemed, she had been sitting. He wished he had someone to comfort him for a moment before forced the selfish thought from his mind and passing on Zelena’s message.

“They’ll be running some basic tests,” Regina explained to Emma. “Just confirming everything is as we expected it to be and that the filgrastim shots did what they needed to and encouraged enough of Neal’s stem cells into his bloodstream.”

“How long?” Emma asked, her patience wearing thin.

“Doctor West told me half an hour,” Neal shrugged.

Emma huffed but nodded. It wasn’t like she wanted them to cut corners. She knew the doctors were doing what was right for Henry and her frustration wasn’t good for anything. Regina’s hand landed comfortingly on her arm and she felt a little of the tension leave her body. Most, however, remained.

“Mum?”

Three heads turned and forced smiles appeared.

“Hi baby,” Emma said, rushing to her son’s side and smoothing the damp hair from his forehead.

“What’s happening?” he asked sleepily.

“Well, Neal just got back from his transplant and now Doctor Zelena is checking everything is ok with the stem cells they got and then it’ll be time to put it into you.”
“Soon?”

“Yeah, really soon,” Emma nodded vigorously. “You’re almost there, kid. You’ve been so brave.”

“Can I have some water?”

“Sure,” Emma said, pouring him some and holding the straw to his lips. “Are you hungry?” she asked when he had finished drinking.

“No,” Henry said quietly. “Mum, are you staying here with me?”

“Of course,” Emma said, sitting down on the edge of Henry’s bed. “I’ll be here for every second.”

Henry lifted his arms weakly towards the woman and Emma bent over him, her own wrapped carefully around him, avoiding touching the catheter hidden beneath his gown to which Belle had attached a drip not long after Neal had departed. She bit her lip hard to stop the tears from falling. She needed to be strong. Henry needed her to be strong.

Regina and Neal watched on, not wanting to interrupt the tender moment between mother and son. Neal might be Henry’s father by blood but it was an incomparable bond to what the boy shared with Emma. And while Henry might have taken a shine to Regina, the two of them had barely known each other a month. She cared for him deeply and was invested in the outcome of the transplant but once again it was Emma whose whole being was consumed with Henry’s illness.

When Zelena appeared in the room twenty minutes later, Belle following along behind, four sets of eyes looked expectantly at the pair.

“Let’s get this started,” she said as she wheeled the equipment over to the bed. “Henry, how are you doing?”

“I’m ok,” he replied. “You can make me better now?”

“We’re going to do our very best to, yes,” Zelena said. “Your dad gave us some great healthy stem cells and now we can put them in your body and make sure that nasty stuff inside you gets stopped. Does that sound good to you?”

Henry nodded and glanced at Regina. “And it won’t hurt?”

“No,” the brunette assured him. “They can put the cells in through that little tube in your chest just like the drip you’re on now. That doesn’t hurt, does it?”

Henry shook his head. “Ok,” he said. “I’m ready.”

Emma sat down in her chair, holding Henry’s hot little hand in her own sweaty one. She didn’t want to let on to her son how nervous she was but she also couldn’t bear to let go. She wasn’t scared of the procedure; that was the easy bit. She was scared of what came next. Would it work? Would Henry get better? Would he get sicker? Would there be side effects?

Cool, slender fingers interlaced with her free hand as Regina took the seat beside Emma, her touch gentle and reassuring. Emma shot her a grateful look before turning back to watch Zelena who was removing Henry’s gown so she could access the PICC. She had hung a bag of very pale liquid up beside the bed. Emma eyed it curiously.

“The stem cells,” Regina said quietly.
“I thought it would be red, like blood,” Emma said as Zelena detached the drip from Henry’s chest.

“No, that’s the red blood cells which make it appear red but Zelena has only taken the stem cells and they’re not oxidised.”

“I hate biology but I appreciate modern medicine,” Emma said. “Henry, you see that stuff? That’s the good blood cells from Neal which are going to make you better.”

“It looks like egg white,” Henry said suspiciously.

The adults all laughed. “It does but I can promise you it isn’t,” Belle said as she connected the tube to the bag in question. “Ready?” she added, turning to the doctor.

“Yep,” Zelena nodded. “Are you ready to get better Henry?”

“Yes please,” Henry said, his eyes fixated on the tube now attached to his chest. “But only if that really isn’t egg white.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: because this is so sad and difficult to read you need a little light relief.
The Stem Cells

Chapter Notes

A/N: yes, two chapters in two days. Aren’t you lucky? I know I’m known for my cliff hangers but it seemed too cruel to leave you teetering on the edge of Henry’s treatment. We’re not out of the woods yet but we’ve found a well-trodden path …

The first few minutes of the transplant were in complete silence. Zelena was monitoring the machine Henry was hooked up to, Regina’s eyes also flicking regularly to the data on the screen. Emma and Neal, however, were watching their son.

“How long do I have to wait?” Henry asked, looking up at the bag of allegedly not egg yolk solution which hung beside his bed.

“How about an hour,” Zelena said. “How are you feeling?”

Henry shrugged. He didn’t really feel any better or worse than he had for the past week. His body was still tired and hot, the glandular fever having taken hold a little more firmly during the chemotherapy process. The additional antibiotics he had been prescribed had been intended to keep it at bay but the sooner the transplant was done and his body began to produce healthy blood cells again, the better.

“Do you want me to keep reading to you?” Emma asked, picking up the book from the bedside table and hoping to distract them all from the medical proceedings. Henry nodded and Emma began but she had barely read a page when a hacking cough sounded from the bed.

“Henry?” Emma said, jumping up from the chair and peering into her son’s red face. “Are you ok?”

“My chest hurts,” Henry said, his breathing a little harsh.

Emma’s wide eyes snapped up to Zelena, who was leaning over the bed, and then to Regina who had moved to stand right beside her. Neal was standing at the end of the bed, concern etched on his face. Henry coughed again, harsh and ragged.

“What’s happening?” Emma asked, panicked.

“This is a side-effect of the transfusion,” Zelena said. “It should be nothing to worry about and we can’t stop the process because of it. Henry, I’m sorry this is making your chest hurt but you’re going to need to be really brave for me and wait it out. Listen to your mum reading and try to forget about it, ok?”

Henry nodded, bottom lip wobbling, and turned back to Emma who offered him a forced reassuring smile and sank back down into the chair. Her hands trembling slightly, she continued to read.

The rest of the hour dragged by. Emma’s reading was occasionally interrupted by a cough from Henry but after checking he was still ok, she continued. By the time the bag was almost drained,
Henry’s eyes were half closed and he was barely focusing on the story. At the end of the chapter, Emma slid the bookmark into place and tossed it aside, standing up and moving to brush Henry’s damp hair from his forehead.

“He’s burning up,” she remarked as her hand made contact with the hot skin.

“Another side effect,” Zelena said. “His fever should come down in a while. We’re going to give him some antibiotics after the stem cells so that should tamp down the glandular fever.”

“I hate this,” Emma murmured, Henry now asleep in the bed and oblivious to his mother’s admittance. “I hate that he’s going through this.”

“It’s nearly over though,” Regina assured her. “Look, the stem cells are all infused now. All we need to wait for is them to engraft. After that, he’ll be well on his way back to being a healthy little boy again.”

Emma nodded, eyes glistening as she watched Zelena clamp off the tube sticking out of Henry’s chest and set about dismantling the equipment. At the same time, however, Belle was getting the prophylactic antibiotics ready and within minutes a new IV bag full of fluid was hanging on the stand, once more passing medicine into Henry’s body. Throughout the changeover, Henry slept on.

“What now?” Emma asked as Zelena packed away the equipment.

“We wait,” she said. “Henry will need to be on the IV for an hour but for now his vitals look good. Some patients experience a drop in blood pressure but his looks good. The fact that he’s sleeping now probably means his chest has relaxed a little and hopefully that cough will have gone too. I’m going to have to head out on my rounds but Belle can wait with you. And Regina can step in if necessary.”

“Of course,” the brunette said. “But that won’t be necessary,” she added to Emma.

“We just wait?” Neal said, speaking for the first time in almost an hour.

“That’s all we can do,” Zelena nodded. “Now it’s up for Henry’s body to do what it will with the new stem cells. All we can do is hope for the best.”

With a final smile at the worried family and Regina, Zelena left. Belle busied herself tidying up the equipment as Emma and Regina sank into their chairs beside Henry’s bed. Neal too, took his seat against the wall facing Henry.

“The worst is over,” Regina said quietly.

“Only if it works,” Emma remarked.

She wanted to be positive but it was hard. She looked at her son, lying asleep on the hospital bed. His thin chest rose and fell as he breathed steadily, the new tube catching the light as it moved and glistening slightly. She hated to think of him being pumped with so many chemicals. She hated how much he had already endured. She prayed he wouldn’t need to go through it all again. She prayed the stem cells from Neal now circulating through their son’s body would work. She prayed Henry would get better. She didn’t believe in God but she prayed anyway.

It was well after lunch when Henry woke again. Sandwiches Zelena had brought back with her for Regina, Neal and Emma lay untouched on a tray when he opened his eyes and looked around. His gown was back in place but he could feel the strange tube contraption was still inside him. Belle
had disappeared, as had the bag of egg yolk which had been going into his body. He could see Neal at the end of his bed, head leaning against the wall and his eyes closed. He turned to his left and saw his mum and Regina, the two of them sitting close to one another, foreheads touching.

“Mum?”

Emma pulled back from the comforting feel of her girlfriend and turned to smile at her son. “Hi kid. How are you feeling?”

“Dunno,” Henry said.

“How’s your chest?” Regina asked.

“Oh,” Henry said, realising the tightness which he had felt when he went to sleep had left his body. He was relieved. Those coughs had hurt. “Is it all finished.”

“Yes,” Emma said, just as Neal woke up and realised his son was awake again. “Yes you have all of Neal’s stem cells in you and Belle gave you some extra medicine to stop you feeling so hot. Do you feel hot?” she added.

“I always feel hot,” Henry replied. “I have a fever.”

“Good point,” Regina said, smiling at the boy. “But do you feel hotter than you have the past few days?”

“No,” Henry said after a pause. “So It’s over? I don’t need more medicine?”

Emma turned to Regina and nodded for the brunette to answer. “Well, you’re going to need to get some of that medicine in a bag given to you once a day for a couple of weeks,” Regina explained. “And Doctor Zelena will be doing tests every day to check how your blood is doing with Neal’s stem cells. Hopefully in about three weeks, if you’re showing improvements, you can go home.”

“Three weeks? That’s ages!” Henry groaned.

“Yeah, it is,” Emma agreed. “But at least you get to be in this room with SpongeBob and me and Neal every day. We can bring you some more toys when you get stronger too.”

“Can I get out of bed and go for walks around the hospital?”

“Not yet,” Regina said. “Your body is still vulnerable to getting other illnesses because of that medicine you had this week.”

That didn’t make much sense to Henry. How could medicine make you more likely to get sick? Wasn’t medicine given to people to make them feel better? He was sceptical of that but he knew his mum trusted Regina and that meant he did too. He nodded his understanding and turned his attention to Neal who had been watching the trio from the far side of the room.

“Your stem cells are inside me now,” he stated.

“Yeah, they are,” Neal nodded, standing up and walking over to the bed.

“What are stem cells?”

“They’re new baby cells which can turn into lots of different types of cell,” Regina explained. “Our bones make stem cells and then they become all sorts of cell in our body. So the stem cells Neal gave you are going to help teach your body how to make healthy blood.”
“You gave me teacher cells?”

“I guess,” Neal nodded. He really had flunked biology at school and what had happened to his son today was way beyond his comprehension. “Is that ok?”

“That’s cool,” Henry nodded. “That’s what dads do, isn’t it? Teach their sons fun stuff.”

“Yeah, it is,” Neal nodded.

“Can you teach me to play football better when I’m better?” Henry asked. “I want to play for Spurs when I’m older.”

“Spurs?” Neal asked. “They’re my team too.”

“Really?” Henry said, eyes lighting up for the first time in days. “Who’s your favourite player?”

“Um, before you guys get lost to the world of football,” Emma interrupted. “Neal, are you ok to stay here with Henry for a bit? I’d like some fresh air?”

“Of course,” Neal nodded. A lot had changed since he first met his son and the sheer terror he had felt at being asked to watch him the previous Sunday no longer came. Plus, there was a nurse in the corner of the room in case anything medical happened, he reasoned.

“Thanks,” Emma said before reaching for Regina’s hand and leading the way out of the room.

Once they had removed their sterile suits and stepped into the corridor, the two women stopped holding hands. Although it wasn’t exactly unknown that Regina was closely involved with the treatment of a patient to whom she was not the assigned physician, they had decided it was best not to flaunt their new relationship in her workplace. They walked through the corridors quickly, heading to the front entrance which led onto the large car park. Although Regina had insisted Emma go for short walks every day, the blonde had not spent much time in fresh air over the past week and when she stepped outside, her lungs filled gratefully with it. Well, almost gratefully. They were still standing in the middle of London.

She let out a shuddering breath, glanced up at the light grey sky and set off around the building, Regina by her side. They walked in silence for a while but Emma was no longer able to resist reaching for her girlfriend’s hand. A little while later they found a bench and sat down. The view wasn’t much; a few cars and a line of trees, but it was something.

“How are you?” Regina asked finally.

“Scared shitless,” Emma admitted, her pale face turned towards the woman beside her. “I know there’s nothing more we can do but it’s torture. I just want to make him better, you know?”

“I do,” Regina nodded. “And we are. I promise. Everything is going really well so far and Henry’s responding exactly as we’d hoped. He has a few more weeks of tests and antibiotics and his body will recover and get stronger. Before you know it, you’ll both be back in your flat.”

“What about the side effects?” Emma asked. Zelena had told her about the possible problems which came from stem cell transplants. They had terrified her.

“We don’t know Henry will develop any but if he does, we’ll deal with them,” Regina said.

Emma nodded. She knew it did no good to speculate but her mind continued to race through different possibilities. Regina’s hand on her thigh distracted her temporarily and she looked once
“You’ve been amazing, Emma,” she murmured. “I’m so proud of the way you’ve handled everything. A sick child is one of the worst things a parent can go through and you’ve been so strong for Henry. And dealing with Neal coming into your lives at the same time. I can’t imagine how difficult this has been for you.”

“I’m exhausted,” Emma said, tears spilling from her eyes at last. “I’m so tired, Regina. I have barely slept all week and I can’t stop worrying. I just … I just want it all to be over.”

“We all do,” Regina said, pulling the blonde into her arms. Emma’s head fell against her neck, hot tears prickling her skin as she held the sobbing woman. She couldn’t begin to understand what Emma was going through but at least she could, in some way, support her through this time.

“We should get back,” Emma said after a while.

“Neal can manage a little longer without you,” Regina said, her arm not releasing the woman who had made no move out of the embrace. “In fact,” Regina swallowed, “he’s been great with Henry.”

“He has,” Emma nodded. “Better than I imagined.”

“Let’s hope he sticks around,” Regina remarked.

“He’s told me he wants to,” Emma said. “And the fact that he hasn’t even mentioned going back to Cardiff is a good thing.”

“Is it?”

The words were out of Regina’s mouth before she could stop them. She winced as Emma finally sat up and wiped her teary face.

“Um, yeah, it is,” she said slowly. “For Henry, remember?”

“I know, I’m sorry,” Regina said. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“You’re still jealous of him?” Emma asked. She didn’t need a verbal answer to know what the brunette was thinking. “I’m gay, Regina. I have zero interest in Neal. He doesn’t have any interest in me either.”

“Of course he does. You’re gorgeous and he’s a red blooded man.”

“But that doesn’t mean he’s going to try and get with me,” Emma defended. “And then, once again, there’s the fact that I like women. Jesus, Regina. Even if Neal did try something, which he hasn’t and I don’t think he will, I’d tell him to fuck off. Why can’t you trust me to do that?”

“I do trust you,” Regina said hurriedly. “I do, Emma.”

“It doesn’t feel like it,” Emma remarked. “Please, I don’t need this right now. Neal has done an amazing thing for Henry and I will always be grateful to him for saving our son’s life. But that doesn’t mean I want anything to happen between us. I’m with you, remember?”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry,” Regina repeated. “Emma, please, I’m sorry.”

The blonde sighed and leaned back against the bench, hands over her face. She rubbed furiously a few times before dropping them to see a nervous-looking Regina.
“I’m sorry too,” Emma admitted. “I know this isn’t exactly the best way to start a new relationship.”

“None of this is your fault,” Regina said at once.

“I know but it still means you’re having to be patient with me and I can’t exactly give you my full attention.”

“I’d never ask for that. Even if Henry wasn’t sick, I know your son comes first.”

“He does,” Emma said. “Always will. But I’m still sorry that you’ve had to deal with this and the whole Neal thing. I’m getting the sense that you’re a jealous person?”

“What makes you think that?” Regina deadpanned.

Emma laughed. “I usually find jealousy sexy in partners. It makes me feel like they really want me.”

“I do really want you,” Regina said, placing a firm kiss to Emma’s lips.

“And I want you too,” Emma said, kissing the retreating lips herself before continuing. “I really want you, Regina. So there is no need to be jealous. And right now, to be honest, I can’t deal with whatever mistrust you have of Neal. He’s saved Henry’s life. I can’t ask him to go back to Cardiff just to make you feel better.”

“No, of course not,” Regina said. “I’d never ask you to do that.”

“Good, because I owe Neal everything. I may not be remotely interested in being in a relationship with him but he will forever be in Henry’s life now. And that means he’ll also be in mine.”

“And I’ll have to learn to deal with that,” Regina said. “I’m trying, Emma, really. Jealousy has always been a problem I’ve faced in relationships.”

“Can I do anything to make you feel more secure?”

Regina couldn’t help but smile at the sweet offer. “No, honey, it’s fine. It’s my issue. I just have to remind myself that you’re with me, not him, for a reason.”

“Yeah, you don’t have a dick.”

Regina burst out laughing at that and Emma smothered the giggles with another kiss. It became tenderer as their tongues joined, both women giving and receiving reassurance of their continued support and commitment to one another. When the kiss broke, Regina spoke before she had a chance to talk herself out of the idea.

“Stay at mine tonight,” she said quietly. “Give yourself a break from the hospital. Neal will be fine here. Get a good night’s sleep and come back rested and ready to help Henry as he begins his recovery.”

“Leave him overnight?”

“He’ll be fine,” Regina assured her. “And we can have Neal or the hospital call the moment something happens. Which it won’t. But you need this, Emma. You’re exhausted. You said so yourself.”

Emma knew Regina was right. Knew she needed to sleep and have some time away from the
hospital. But so did Henry. He wanted to walk outside. He wanted to sleep a proper, restful sleep, not one brought on by illness. How was it fair that she could leave and her son couldn’t?

“You’ll be better able to support Henry if you’re looking after yourself too,” Regina said quietly. “And he won’t be alone. His dad will be there too.”

“Henry’s never had a dad before,” Emma mused. “It’s strange.”

“I can imagine many single parents find it a big change to their lives when suddenly there’s a partner there to share responsibilities. Perhaps tonight is the night you can take that first step. Of course, you should talk to Henry about it and check he’s ok with it first but if he is, I think a night to yourself might do you the world of good.”

“You think they’d be ok? Neal would be able to take care of Henry?”

“Henry is asleep most of the time and in a hospital filled with excellent doctors and nurses,” Regina reminded Emma. “I think the two of them will be just fine.”

Emma thought for a moment and then looked at her girlfriend. Regina was waiting patiently enough for the answer but Emma could tell the brunette desperately wanted her to say yes. Despite Regina assuring her that she understood where Emma’s priorities lay, she also knew it had been a rough way to start a relationship. Henry deserved all of Emma’s energy, of course, and she had given that to him. But now there was someone, as Regina said, to share the load. Perhaps it was time Emma began to accept she was no longer a single parent in every sense of the word. Emma needed some time away from the hospital. Regina deserved some time with Emma for all of her help and support over the past month. And Neal had earned Emma’s trust and perhaps he too deserved some one on one time with his son.

“Ok,” she said at last. “I’ll ask Henry if he’s ok with me spending the night at yours.”
A Night Off

Chapter Notes

A/N: look at me go. Such speed! Here’s a chapter almost entirely filled with our two favourite ladies. It seemed the story had become to heavily medical and although we will be returning to the hospital, I wanted to give the characters a break. Oh, and it’s NSFW.

Henry and Neal were deep in conversation about Tottenham Hotspurs when the women returned. Emma couldn’t help but smile at how her son was bonding with Neal and felt a little more relaxed about the prospect of leaving the two of them that night. When she broached the idea with them, Neal nodded his agreement and Henry, after a moment, did too.

“But you’ll come back tomorrow morning?” he asked as Emma packed up her bag later that day.

“First thing,” Emma nodded. “Regina starts work at eight so I’ll be here then as well. And if you need anything, just ask Neal to call me.”

“Ok,” Henry said, yawning widely.

“Sleepy?” Emma asked, ruffling his hair.

“Yeah,” he nodded.

“Well then why don’t you go to sleep and by the time you wake up it’ll be morning and I’ll be back.”

Henry seemed to think that was a good idea and closed his eyes as Emma placed a final kiss to his forehead. After Neal assured Emma that he would indeed call if anything happened or if Henry just wanted to talk to his mother, she left the private room and headed down to the car park where she was meeting Regina.

It was dark outside and the chilly winter air made Emma shiver as she wrapped her coat around her. She didn’t have to wait long outside the hospital entrance, however, as seconds later a sleek black Mercedes pulled up. With difficulty, Emma peered through the tinted windows and saw Regina.

“You’re flash,” she remarked as she got into the low-slung car.

Regina just chuckled. “I like to ride in style.”

“Clearly,” Emma said, leaning over the centre console and giving the brunette a short kiss.

“Ready?” Regina asked.

Emma glanced up at the hospital towering beside her, within which her son was now, hopefully, sleeping peacefully. “Yeah,” she said after a moment. “Let’s go.”
“Holy shit.”

Emma stopped dead in the hallway of Regina’s penthouse, her gaze transfixed on the view before her. Floor to ceiling windows overlooked the glittering city of London below her. She dropped her bag on the floor and moved towards the view, taking in the familiar sights and landmarks. Battersea Power Station loomed closest but in the distance she could see the familiar towers of the financial district, the Shard rising sharply above them all.

“This is the best view of the city I’ve ever seen,” Emma declared, nose practically pressed against the glass.

“It’s not bad,” Regina conceded, smiling as she watched her girlfriend.

Emma spun around. “Regina, this is insane. This whole place is amazing! I feel embarrassed ever having invited you to my hovel now.”

“Hey!” Regina said indignantly. “I think your flat is great. It’s a proper home. This might be big,” she gestured to the large living area they were now standing in, “but it doesn’t feel much like a home to me.”

Emma looked around. It was true; there weren’t many personal possessions around. She supposed Regina spent much of her time at work and hadn’t got around to decorating the space yet. But that didn’t mean it wasn’t the most incredible apartment Emma had ever been in. She turned back to the window and looked down. From twenty floors up she watched the quiet street, only a few people making their way to and from engagements on a Saturday night. She was still watching when Regina approached and slipped her arms around Emma’s waist.

“I’m glad you came back with me,” she murmured, pressing her lips to the nape of Emma’s neck.

“Me too,” Emma sighed, her hands covering Regina’s where they lay splayed on her stomach. “You were right. I needed a break. And Henry will be ok with Neal, won’t he?”

“They’ll both be fine,” Regina assured her. “You’ll be back there in less than twelve hours anyway.”

“I hate that I’ve left him there,” Emma mused.

“You didn’t leave him, Emma. He’s with his father, remember? Neal will be with him the whole time and Henry will probably just sleep through the night. He’s still going to be very lethargic for weeks. If you had stayed at the hospital, you’d just be watching him sleep.”

“I should call,” Emma said, pulling away from the tender embrace. “Just in case.”

Regina didn’t try and stop her. She knew if the blonde felt the need to contact Henry there was nothing she should or could do to stop that from happening. So instead she moved through to the kitchen and began to cobble together a salad with whatever ingredients she could find in the fridge. She was just pan-frying some chicken breast when Emma reappeared.

“Wow, this is gorgeous too,” she breathed, looking around the black granite kitchen.

“Yes,” Regina agreed. “This is my favourite room, actually. I just wish I could spend more time in here learning how to cook but after work I’m usually too tired to do anything too complicated. How was Henry?”

“Asleep, like you said,” Emma said as she perched herself on the counter beside the half-made
“He will,” Regina nodded, moving from the stove to stand in front of the blonde. Emma opened her legs to allow Regina to stand between them as their lips met. It was a slow, reassuring kiss, Regina trying to calm the worried mother down and promise her that nothing would happen to her son while she was away. Emma too was trying to distract herself. She knew Regina was right. She knew she needed some time to herself. She knew Henry would be just fine without her for a night.

“What are we having?” Emma asked when Regina stepped away and returned to stirring the chicken.

“Just a salad,” Regina replied. “I didn’t have much in, to be honest. Could you possibly cut that avocado for me?”

“Have you treated one of those idiots who’s stabbed their hand trying to get the stone out of the middle of an avocado?” Emma asked, remembering an item she had seen on the news earlier in the week.

“Three,” Regina nodded. “This year.”

Emma laughed. “Wow, people are stupid,” she remarked as she carefully cut into the avocado and then reached for a spoon to dislodge the troublesome stone. “Well, looks like you won’t be sewing my hand back together today.”

“Good,” Regina chuckled. “Because that would totally ruin this date.”

“This is a date?”

Regina blushed. “Well, I guess so. It’s not like we’ve had a lot of time just the two of us since we met. And I know why,” she added hastily, “but when we do get time like this together, then yes, I suppose I do think of them as dates. Is that ok?”

“That’s fine,” Emma nodded. “I just feel underdressed.” She plucked at the old sweater she was wearing and the jeans which she had sported every day that week. She suddenly wished she had asked Regina if they could go back to her house so she could grab something else to change into. But Regina leaned over and planted a firm kiss on Emma’s lips before she had any more time to think about it.

“You’re beautiful,” she said when she pulled away.

Ten minutes later and Emma and Regina were sat at the barely used dining table, eating large portions of salad. Regina had rustled up a dressing and even she had to admit the meal was pretty impressive considering it was unplanned and comprised of whatever she had been able to find in the fridge. The conversation flowed easily but, notably, didn’t mention Henry. It wasn’t that they were avoiding that monumental part of Emma’s life but both women recognised that the blonde needed a little time away from hospitals and medicine and sick children. It felt good, Emma realised, to act, just for a while, like the woman she had been before the first of January that year, before her son got so sick.

After they had finished, they stacked the dishwasher and Regina wiped down the kitchen. She might not spend much time in the room but she was determined to keep it clean and tidy for the rare occasions when she did have the time and energy to cook. Once it was up to her standards, the two made their way through to the living room where they curled up on the sofa and switched on the TV. The images flashed before Emma’s eyes but she wasn’t really taking anything in. It felt
strange to be sitting on a comfortable sofa, watching a massive television in a huge, luxurious apartment. Henry, on the other hand, was lying in his hospital bed.

“It’s ok if you want to go back to him.”

The words were barely whispers but Emma heard them. She could feel Regina, against whose body she was resting, take a deep breath as if waiting for Emma’s answer for the out she had offered.

“No,” Emma said quietly. “He’s with his father. He’s fine. You’re right, I needed some time away from there.”

“Are you sure?” Regina asked as Emma turned around so their eyes met. “I don’t want you to be here against your will. Maybe it was too soon. Maybe I should have waited to ask you back here.”

“Regina, no, I want to be here. I want to be with you.”

Emma craned her neck up and kissed the worried lips above her, trying to reassure the brunette that she really did want to be there. And she did. She loved spending time with Regina. Sure, she was thinking about Henry all of the time as well and she couldn’t stop herself wondering what was going on in the familiar hospital room she had barely left for the past six days. But that didn’t mean she couldn’t have a good time with her girlfriend as well. It wasn’t wrong of her to have something to smile about in such a dark time, was it?

“What can I do?” Regina asked. “What can I do to make you feel better?”

There was a pause as Emma considered the answer. Nothing would honestly make her feel better until Henry was healthy and happy again. She already knew Regina was doing everything in her power to make that happen and there really was nothing else the doctor could do to speed the recovery process along.

“Just make me forget,” she said eventually. “I just want to forget all about it, for a little while.”

Regina nodded her understanding and offered a sympathetic smile before another look stole over her features. Emma’s heartbeat quickened as she watched Regina’s eyes darken, her gaze shifting from green orbs to pale, thin lips. Their mouths met, both women moving willingly towards the other. Yes, Emma thought, perhaps this would allow her to forget everything that was happening. At least for a while.

They stumbled into Regina’s bedroom, Emma not even having the time to take in yet another stunning view of night time London before Regina fumbled for a switch on the wall and electric blinds lowered.

“Fancy,” Emma mumbled against the plump lips, her fingers already undoing the buttons of Regina’s blouse.

The brunette, for her part, had already pulled Emma’s sweater over her head and was now raking her fingernails over the smooth skin of Emma’s lower back beneath her tank top. But that soon changed as the blonde became impatient and ripped off her own top just after she had rid Regina of her shirt. Their mouths fused back together at once, arms encircling, drawing their hot flesh together as they moved to the bed.

Emma tumbled backwards onto it, landing on the heavenly soft sheets as Regina toppled on top of her, chasing the broken kiss. Emma allowed Regina’s tongue to plunder her mouth willingly, pleased to be able to focus on something other that her son. His face popped, unbidden, into her mind and she tensed.
“Want me to stop?” Regina asked, feeling the blonde’s body go ridged beneath her own.

“No,” Emma said, flipping the older woman over and kissing her hard. “No, I need this.”

Soon Regina’s slacks had been tugged off and thrown across the room. Emma’s jeans were pulled harshly from her feet and followed seconds later. Regina watched, breathless, as she lay on the bed with Emma standing before her, fingers unclasping her own bra. As the cups fell away, Regina beckoned the woman towards her and Emma came. She crawled up the bed, over the woman’s body, breasts hanging temptingly before chocolate eyes. Too temptingly. Emma sighed in delight as a hot mouth enveloped one of her nipples, the neglected one hardening almost painfully as she felt the tip of Regina’s tongue swirl over the pebbled skin.

Reaching beneath her girlfriend, Emma quickly divested Regina of her bra before pulled almost reluctantly away from the sinfully talented mouth and instead lowering her own lips to Regina’s now bare chest. Dark eyes watched as Emma’s lips latched onto a tight nipple, teeth grazing it teasingly before she switched sides. She closed her eyes, running her tongue across the peak of Regina’s breast several times, tasting the woman’s skin. And yet it still wasn’t enough. She could still see her son lying, dwarfed in the vast hospital bed.

Without warning, Emma scrambled down the bed, hands desperately ripping the lace thong from Regina’s body. Except it didn’t rip so Emma just pushed the scrap of material aside so she could get at the tender flesh beneath it. Regina yelped as Emma’s tongue swiped through her folds, fingers gripping the sheet as she widened her stance to accommodate Emma’s body.

She knew what this was. Regina knew Emma was trying to forget. She wanted to help and she was more than happy to have Emma’s mouth now eagerly working against her hot, tender sex. But she also knew that Emma’s tongue was working so furiously because Emma was desperately trying to distract herself.

And then Emma pushed two fingers into Regina’s channel, without warning, and the brunette stopped caring why the woman between her thighs was so enthusiastically eating her cunt. She stopped thinking about Henry. She stopped feeling any sort of jealousy towards Neal. All she could think about was Emma and the fact that the woman whose tongue was now drawing tight, relentless circles around her clit while two, no, three fingers were jackhammered furiously into her core was her girlfriend. Emma Swan was Regina Mills’ girlfriend.

She came with a scream, her hands suddenly grasping Emma’s head, drawing the woman impossibly closer to her sex as she rode her orgasm out. Emma didn’t stop her movements until Regina’s hand fell limply away, a silent sign that the woman was spent. Her face wet with the brunette’s juices, Emma licked her lips and crawled back up the woman before her, flopping onto her side and throwing her leg over Regina’s waist. Her own hot centre touched the brunette’s hip and Emma let out a sigh of delight, somewhat impatiently waiting her turn.

“Two seconds,” Regina panted beside her. “You can use my leg if you need to.”

“I’m not going to hump you,” Emma chuckled. “I can wait.”

“Thanks,” Regina said, offering Emma a lazy kiss. “I just need a moment.”

“Fucked your brains out, did I?” Emma smirked.

“You’re very talented,” Regina nodded.

Emma laughed and kissed the flushed cheek. Regina turned towards her and their lips met once
more, the taste of Regina’s own essence shared on their tongues. It didn’t take long for Regina to regain control of her breathing and turn on her side, pressing her front against Emma’s and sliding her hand down to squeeze the blonde’s small butt.

“You’re so toned,” she murmured as she pushed Emma gently on the shoulder and encouraged her to roll onto her back. “Your body is quite exquisite.”

“Thanks,” Emma said, a little shy as the doctor’s eyes roved over her body. “I’m afraid I haven’t been to the gym much since -”

“Then let’s give you a work out,” Regina interrupted, not wanting the conversation to draw them back to the topic Emma had expressly asked Regina to make her forget.

Emma nodded her agreement and met the next hungry kiss eagerly. She gasped as Regina climbed on top of her, straddling her hips and giving both breasts a rough palming before she moved one hand down to cup Emma’s sex. The other hand remained where it was, teasing Emma’s hard nipple.

“So wet,” Regina murmured. “You’re so ready for me, Emma.”

“I am,” Emma nodded. “Please. I need you.”

Regina acquiesced and pushed two fingers slowly into the blonde’s channel. Emma let out a sigh of delight as she felt her body stretch around the welcome intrusion. She arched her back a little, rocking her hips up as she came back to the bed and Regina understood. She began to pump, short, steady movements as Emma’s body relaxed further. It didn’t take long for Regina to add a third finger, the stretch equally pleasant and erotic.

Twisting her hand slightly, Regina pushed her thumb against Emma’s neglected clit. The blonde bucked her hips, cursing quietly. Regina smirked and lowered her lips to Emma’s neglected nipple, snagging it between her teeth and pull back. Another gasp.

“You like it rough?” she asked, curious eyes peering up from Emma’s chest.

“A little,” Emma admitted shyly.

“How rough?”

“I’ll tell you if it’s too much,” she said, eyes darkening further as she felt Regina’s fingers move inside her.

“Four?” she asked, twitching the three digits already inside.

Emma nodded, biting her lip. She was unashamed to admit she loved the feeling of her sex being filled. Regina smiled, leaned up to kiss Emma’s lips before shuffling down the bed until she lay between Emma’s legs. The lighting was dim but she could clearly see Emma’s sex, glistening wet flesh between which Regina’s fingers disappeared. She curled her little finger into the palm of her hand and pushed all four gently into the waiting blonde.

The blonde sighed in delight as she felt her body widen that little bit further. When all four of Regina’s fingers were inside Emma and before the younger woman could utter a word, plump lips began to suck at her clit. Emma cried out, hips leaping off the bed before Regina hastily pinned them down with her free arm. She pumped quickly, thrusting her four fingers deeply in and out of Emma’s core. The walls rippled, squeezing rhythmically as Regina moved. Curling her fingers slightly, she let her tongue trail slowly over Emma’s bundle of nerves and was pleased to hear a
keening wail.

Emma was close. Regina knew it. She pumped a little harder, pushed a little deeper, felt her knuckles bumping into Emma’s pelvic bone, her tongue rubbing faster over the sensitive nub. The sound of her fingers entering and leaving Emma’s core filled her ears along with cries and curses and moans of delight from the woman who was about to come gloriously against her face.

As Regina’s teeth closed carefully over Emma’s clit, she exploded. Her vision went white and she arched high off the bed, her body quaking and shuddering in unadulterated pleasure as she crested, her core clenching so hard around Regina’s fingers that the woman was forced to pause her pumping movement. The final noise to leave the spent woman was a single word. A name. Regina.

“Are you ok?” Regina asked when she had pulled out of the blonde and collapsed beside her on the bed.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m more than ok,” Emma sighed. “Wow, Regina. You’re incredible at reading what my body needs.”

“That was ok?” she asked. “The bite?”

“Perfect,” Emma nodded. “So perfect. Thank you.”

“No need to thank me,” Regina assured her. “I loved every minute of it.”

Emma smiled dopily and pulled Regina into her arms. They snuggled up, wriggling beneath the thick duvet as they both suddenly realised they were getting a little chilled as the sweat dried on their skin. Emma settled beneath the softest sheets she had ever felt, Regina’s naked body pressed hotly against her own and let out a deep sigh.

“He’ll be fast asleep,” Regina assured her into the darkness. “He won’t even be aware that you’re not there.”

“It felt good,” Emma admitted after a pause.

“What did?”

“To forget. Just for a moment, for a few minutes, I was Emma again. I wasn’t Henry’s Mum, I wasn’t the mother to a sick kid. I was just … me. Does that make me awful? Does that make me a bad mother?”

“It makes you human,” Regina assured. “It makes you completely normal, Emma. You’re going through hell. Don’t be so harsh on yourself. I completely understand your need to block out the reality of your situation right now and I’m just glad I could help you do it.”

“You did help,” Emma said, placing a soft kiss to Regina’s cheek. “You’ve been amazing, Gina. Today, this past week, since the first day we met. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Regina said, kissing her girlfriend back. “Now, let’s get to sleep. We’ve got to be up early in the morning to get back to the hospital.”

“Back to reality,” Emma added.

“Yes,” Regina agreed. “Back to reality.”
The walk from the reception up to the private room the following morning was quick. Emma wasn’t exactly worried about Henry but she was definitely anxious to get back to him. She had given Regina a brief kiss before she hopped out of the car, leaving the brunette to drive into the staff area of the car park and hurried into the hospital. Inside the small sterile area between the corridor and Henry’s room, Emma quickly donned the overalls before opening the door.

“Mum,” came a quiet but excited voice from the bed.

“Hi kid,” Emma said, moving straight to Henry’s side and kissing his cheek. “How was your night?”

“Fine,” the boy replied, smiling up at his mother. “Where’s Gina?”

“She’s at work downstairs,” Emma said, nodding at Neal who had been dozing on the camp bed but just woken up. “She’s going to come up and say hello when she gets her lunch break though. What did you guys do last night?”

“Sleep,” Henry replied slowly, as if it were perfectly obvious that he had been doing nothing else in his mother’s absence.

“Yeah, he slept right through,” Neal replied.

Emma smiled gratefully at the man and sank into her usual chair. “Have you guys had breakfast?”

“No yet,” Neal said. “Henry wasn’t hungry when he woke up an hour ago. How about now, little man? Do you want me to get something for you?”

“Coco Pops?” Henry asked hopefully. He wasn’t usually allowed sugary cereal but he had learned that since he had become sick, his mother bowed to every food demand he gave. One perk, he acknowledged. But he’d happily never eat Coco Pops again in his life if Doctor Lena would take the painful tube out of his chest.

“Done,” Neal said after he had received an affirmative nod from Emma.

Once the two of them were alone, Henry closed his eyes again. He might have slept all night but he was still tired. His whole body felt heavy and weak and he decided to nap while waiting for his breakfast. Emma was content just to watch her son, reassured that he was doing ok, that the treatment was over and that, so far, his body was accepting the stem cells.

Zelena wasn’t working that day and her replacement, Doctor Fisher, arrived to check on Henry and draw some blood for tests soon after the boy had managed to eat about half a bowl of chocolatey cereal. The fact that he declined Emma’s offer to pour the flavoured milk into a cup for him spoke
volumes about how sick the boy still was. As soon as Doctor Fisher left, Henry was asleep again.

“Was last night ok?” Emma asked Neal when their son was sleeping, walking over to the small bed and sitting down on it beside the man.

“Not a problem at all,” Neal assured her. “Like he said, he was asleep. I didn’t really do anything.”

“Still, thank you,” Emma said. “It was … yeah, I needed to get out of here for a bit.”

“Glad I could help,” Neal replied. “And I’m grateful you trust me enough to leave our son with me overnight.”

“You’re great with him,” Emma said simply. “He likes you.”

“I just can’t wait for him to be better so we can do normal father-son things,” Neal replied. “But I guess that’s going to be a few months down the line.”

“We’ll get there,” Emma said. “He’s going to get better eventually and then you can take him out for football sessions in the park and whatever else you guys want to do.”

“I’d like that,” Neal replied. “Thank you.”

Emma accepted the thanks, still thinking she didn’t really deserve them after the fact that she had been the one to keep Neal from his son in the first place. She didn’t need to go over that again though. Neal had forgiven her. She just needed to forgive herself.

“Um, I got a text from my boss earlier,” Neal began after a moment of silence.

“And?”

“And I need to go back to Cardiff.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow,” Neal admitted. “He’d given me a week off work after I explained what I was doing. I have annual leave left, in theory, but it’s only the start of the year and I can’t really afford to -”

“It’s ok, I get it,” Emma said. “I’m going to have to go into the office next week too. Henry comes first but we’ve gotta put food on the table, right?”

“Yeah,” Neal nodded. “I’m sorry, Emma. I want to stay here but there really isn’t anything more I can do and I can’t lose this job. Once I’m back at work I can book a few days off to come back and see you guys though.”

“We’d like that,” Emma said, glancing at their son who was still sleeping. “Do you want to tell Henry yourself?”

“Yes, please,” Neal replied. “I need him to know that I’m not going anywhere. I mean, physically I am but now I’m in his life, I want to be some sort of father to him. I just can’t stay here all of the time.”

“He understands that,” Emma said. “He knows you don’t live in London and he knows Cardiff is further than Bristol. We drive down to see my parents often enough and he’s always complaining about how far it is. Just be careful what you promise him in terms of coming back. Maybe wait until you’ve spoken to your boss before you give him a definite date.”
“Ok,” Neal said. “And you’ll be ok? I mean, I’d like to think I’ve been somewhat helpful this week.”

“Aside from giving our son life-saving stem cells?” Emma grinned. “You’ve been amazing, Neal. Seriously. The fact that there’s been someone in here so I can leave to go to the canteen or nip home to get a change of clothes has been invaluable, really. I don’t know how I would have got through this without you.”

Without thinking, Emma pulled Neal into a tight hug. It was true; everything she said. The fact that finally, for the first time in years, she was no longer a single parent had been a huge relief for the blonde. The fact that there was someone else who understood what she was going through, on some level, had been a great source of comfort. Everyone who had been involved, Regina, Zelena, Belle, even her parents in absentia, had been amazing. But there was something about having Neal with her that had been different.

Neal hugged her back, a distant memory of the first time they met stirring in his mind. He still didn’t actually remember meeting Emma or the night they had subsequently, obviously, spent together but there was something familiar about holding the slender blonde in his arms. He squeezed a little harder before letting go. Emma pulled back and smiled almost shyly at him, wiping a single tear from her cheek.

“He’s going to be fine,” Neal assured her, reaching out to tuck a lock of hair behind Emma’s ear. “He’s a strong kid and he’s got the most amazing mum.”

“He’s got a great dad too,” Emma said.

Neal’s heart thudded a little faster. He still wasn’t used to thinking of himself as a D-word. But he was starting to realise he liked it, especially when Emma said it. His hand, which had tidied away Emma’s hair, was still resting on the blonde’s shoulder, fingertips touching the smooth, warm skin of her neck. He moved forwards. Just a fraction of an inch. Green eyes widened slightly but Emma’s gaze never left his. Neal was about to move towards the blonde again when the door to the room swung open.

“Regina,” Emma said, jumping up from the bed and moving quickly away from Neal just as the brunette’s eyes scanned the room and landed on the pair. “You’re early.”

There was a split second pause, Regina’s gaze trained on the slightly flushed man now suddenly very interested in the plastic boots covering his shoes, before she spoke. “Yes, I had a break and wanted to come and say hello,” she said, finally looking at Emma whose cheeks were a little flushed. “How’s Henry?”

“Sleeping,” Emma said, moving further away from Neal and towards her son. “Doctor Fisher came and took some blood earlier. She said she’ll be back some time this afternoon with the results. How’s A & E?”

“Full of stragglers from last night,” Regina replied. “I hate working Sundays. It’s just drunken accidents and hungover idiots.”

Emma laughed. “I can imagine. Have you got time for a coffee?”

“No,” Regina replied. “I’ve got to be back in ten minutes. I just wanted to come and see you and Henry.”

“Well, thanks,” Emma said. “That means a lot.”
Regina didn’t reply. Instead she moved towards Henry’s machines and took in the digital information flashing across the screen. Emma risked a glance at Neal who was watching the exchange without saying anything. She minutely shook her head, a silent request for Neal not to say anything. There was nothing to say, after all. And she sure as hell didn’t want to discuss Regina’s unfounded jealously issues at that moment in time. Well, she thought they had been unfounded.

“His vitals look fine,” Regina said after a moment. “His heart rate is a little elevated though. Did Doctor Fisher take his temperature?”

“Yeah,” Emma nodded. “It was the same as yesterday. Still higher than normal but she didn’t say there was anything to worry about.”

“There probably isn’t,” Regina replied, turning around. “It’s just important to keep an eye on his heart rate. This is probably just his body beginning to fight back against the glandular fever again after the chemo but -”

“But what?” Emma interrupted.

“It’s probably nothing,” Regina said at once.

“Then why mention it,” Emma said, her tone a little harder.

Regina raised an eyebrow. She knew Emma wasn’t angry with her, just worried about her son. However, as a doctor she also knew there was no reason to voice what was only a minor suspicion with the blonde so early on. It really was probably nothing and Emma didn’t need anything more to stress about.

“It was an observation,” Regina replied. “There is nothing wrong with Henry’s heart.”

Emma looked unconvinced but nodded. Regina glanced at her watch. “I have to get back. I’ll come up for lunch though, if that’s ok?” She couldn't help but look sideways at the man sitting mute on the bed. She could still see the slight impression in the cheap mattress where Emma had been when she entered the room.

“Yes, of course,” Emma said. “You’re always welcome here.”

“I’ll bring you something,” Regina said, kissing Emma gently on the cheek before leaving the room without a backwards glance.

Emma sighed and rubbed her hands over her face, collapsing into her usual chair just as Neal stood from the bed.

“You ok?” he asked as he approached the bed on which their son continued to sleep soundly.

“Nope,” Emma sighed. “No, I’m not.”

“Sorry,” Neal offered. “I didn’t mean -”

“I’m gay, Neal,” Emma said quietly. “I’m with Regina.”

“I know,” Neal said. “I just thought -”

“Well, don’t think that. Ever again,” Emma interrupted.

“Fine,” Neal said shortly. “I’m going for a walk.”
Without another word, he left the room. The door snapping shut woke Henry before Emma had even had a chance to process what had just happened.

“Mum? Where’s Neal?” Henry asked as he looked around.

“He went for a walk outside,” Emma said. “Did you sleep ok?”

“Yeah,” Henry nodded. “When can I go outside again? I’m bored in here.”

“I know, kid,” Emma said. “I’m sorry you’re having to stay in this room for so long. A few more weeks and you’ll be able to come home though.”

“Can I watch TV?” Henry asked, talking already too exhausting.

“Sure,” Emma nodded, reaching for the control and quickly finding a cartoon she knew her son liked. As he settled down to watch it, she too stared at the screen but her mind was focused on something else.

By the time Regina returned at lunch with a selection of sandwiches for the group, Neal had already told Henry that he would be heading back to Cardiff the following morning. Regina had been able to fake some semblance of disappointment at the news but claimed to be looking forward to seeing the man when he next came to the city. Neither Neal or Emma bought the lie but the blonde was grateful for her girlfriend for keeping things civil.

Emma had also called her parents. David and Mary had been in constant contact with their daughter about Henry’s treatment and had been relentlessly offering to come up and help. With Neal’s presence, however, Emma had assured them it wasn’t necessary. Now, she had let them know that Neal would be leaving and some help would be appreciated. They were already booked on the first train of the following day from Bristol and would bring breakfast to the hospital.

The two women didn’t get a chance to speak alone for the rest of the day and by the time Regina clocked off from work, Emma was back at the apartment picking up some clothes for the upcoming week. She also changed the sheets on her bed and the couch so her parents could stay. Upon returning to the hospital, she discovered that Regina had popped up to see her but when Neal had told the brunette that Emma was at home, the doctor had left. Although Emma wanted to talk to Regina about whatever it was the brunette thought she had seen and reassure her, she didn’t want to do it over text or phone. She sent her a message thanking the brunette for lunch and requested she come up to Henry’s room the following day when she got a moment. The text went unanswered.

Emma lay awake that night, staring at the familiar ceiling of Henry’s hospital room. She was annoyed. At Neal, at Regina, at herself. Neal shouldn’t have done that; even though the man hadn’t really done anything. But Emma also knew that had the door not opened at the moment it did, he would have. She knew she would have pushed him away but that didn’t mean he had the right to try anything. Emma was gay; Neal knew that. She was angry with Regina too. Not for being jealous. She understood the emotion. It was what Regina had said about Henry’s heartbeat. It had set Emma on edge and when she had asked Doctor Fisher about it later in the day, the other paediatric doctor had not seen anything of concern. Had Regina made it up? Just to upset Emma? The blonde didn’t think her girlfriend would be so vindictive but she also recognised that Regina did not deal well with feelings of jealousy.

And finally she was angry with herself. She shouldn’t have gone to sit so close to Neal. She shouldn’t have hugged him. She shouldn’t have let herself be vulnerable next to a man whom she barely knew but who was clearly attracted to her. She knew it wasn’t her fault that Neal had been
close to making a move on her. She knew she had every right to be friends with the father of her son without it meaning anything sexual. But she also couldn’t deny that she’d seen a few appreciative glances being shot her way from the man himself and she also knew Regina was suspicious. She should never have put herself in a position when the relationship between the two of them could be misconstrued.

Henry coughed. Emma sat bolt upright in bed and peered through the blueish light of the room towards her son. He coughed again and rolled over, sleeping deeply as the heartbeat line continued to emit a steady, regular rhythm. Emma lay back down and closed her eyes, trying unsuccessfully to turn her racing mind off.

Zelena closed her locker and flicked her long hair out from beneath her collar before tying it up into a messy bun. She checked the clock on the wall and saw that she had another fifteen minutes before her shift started. Making her way towards the coffee machine, she had just poured herself a cup when the door to the room banged open.

“What’s wrong with you?” Zelena asked, eyebrows raised.

“Nothing,” Regina huffed, making herself her own coffee.

“Well, that’s a blatant lie,” Zelena replied, eyeing her best friend. “What’s up?”

Regina sighed and flopped down in a chair. Zelena sat down herself and waited for her friend to admit whatever it was that was bothering her. And Zelena knew that something was definitely bothering the brunette.

“It’s Emma,” she said quietly.

“Is Henry ok?” Zelena asked, alarmed. She hadn’t had a chance to get up to speed on how her patient was doing after two days off work but figured she’d have been alerted to any changes.

“Yeah, he’s fine,” Regina said. “His heart rate was a little elevated on Sunday but it seems to have slowed again now. Keep an eye on it though.”

Zelena nodded her agreement before waving her hand, gesturing for her friend to continue. If it wasn’t Henry that was the problem, Zelena could only presume it was the boy’s beautiful mother who had got her friend so worked up.

“I think Neal wants to get back with Emma.”

“What?” Zelena frowned.

“I think he wants to waltz into their life and become this perfect family,” Regina all but spat. “He’s hitting on her, making passes and -”

“Woah, Regina, slow down,” Zelena said. “Emma’s gay, remember? What makes you think she’d want anything to do with this guy even if what you’re saying is true?”

“Are you saying I’m making this up?”

“I’m saying you have a problem with jealousy,” Zelena placated, “and that often causes you to fabricate things which aren’t really there. Have you seen Neal actually hitting on Emma? Has Emma said anything to you?”
“They were sat really close together on Sunday,” Regina replied. “And she’s beautiful, Zee, of course he wants to be with her. They share a child.”

“True,” Zelena conceded. “But Neal also has a penis and from what I can tell from observing Emma when she’s with you, that girl wants nothing to do with Henry’s father in a sexual way. Regina, she’s not interested in him. She likes you.”

“But he likes her.”

“So?” Zelena replied. “Whale likes you and you haven’t jumped into bed with him, have you?”

Regina made a face. The thought physically repulsed her even though she got on perfectly well with her colleague. Maybe Zelena had a point.

“Have you talked to Emma about this?”

“Not really,” Regina replied. “She knows I have problems with jealousy but since I caught them -”

“Caught them?”

Regina blushed, perhaps that was an overstatement. After all, she had only seen Emma sitting next to Neal. But there was something about the way both of them hastily moved away from one another, Emma’s pinked cheeks and Neal’s refusal to make eye contact that had roused her suspicions.

“It was nothing,” Regina said. “I thought I might have been interrupting a moment on Sunday but there wasn’t time to talk to Emma about it. Then Neal left yesterday and her parents have been there every time since when I’ve gone to see them.”

“So you’ve been stewing over whatever you thought you saw for two days? Healthy,” Zelena deadpanned. “Go talk to her, Regina. Clear the air. It may be awkward but it will be far better than you making up whatever it is that you’re imagining.”

“I know, I know,” Regina sighed. “I just don’t want to scare her off. Jealousy isn’t great for relationships even though Emma said it made her feel wanted.”

“Well, she’s a weird one then,” Zelena laughed. “There are many more ways in which you can make her feel wanted. How is your sex life, by the way? I would ask for details but seeing as I know her it would be weird.”

“And I wouldn’t tell you,” Regina replied. “Doctor-patient privilege, remember?”

“Ooh, role-play,” Zelena teased as she finished her coffee.

Regina swiped playfully as her friend as the two of them got to their feet. Zelena set off on her rounds and Regina returned to A & E after promising she would go and speak to Emma on her next break. The problem was, Regina didn’t have a clue what to say to her girlfriend.
Boredom was setting in amongst all of them. The brightly painted walls doing little to cheer any of them up. After less than twenty-four hours Emma's parents were already tired of the yellow face smiling down at them. Even Henry grimaced when his formerly favourite show came on the television on Tuesday afternoon. The hospital may have designed the rooms to make their young patients feel at home but in fact SpongeBob had lost all former appeal. Emma didn't mind at first. She had always hated the show. But the change also represented one more glimmer of happiness snuffed out of her son's life so her heart broke a little when he waved his hand towards the remote in an effort to switch channels.

The arrival of her parents the day before had made up for Neal's departure that same morning. Henry had been sad to see his newfound father disappearing back to this mysterious city called Cardiff but he believed him when he had said he was coming back. And then grandad and grandma arrived with new toys and even some sweets. Henry's eyes had lit up at the sight but soon after eating the first small piece of chocolate, he had vomited. Doctor Fisher had assured them it was normal to experience some nausea after the transplant and they had been comparatively lucky. So the stacks of goodies lay on the table at the side of the room, waiting, while a new teddy bear was tucked underneath Henry's blanket and a few books were on the bedside table.

"Another story, Henry?" Mary asked when she noticed he had lost interest in the new show on television. Watching the bright screen for too long gave him a headache.

He nodded but made no move to choose which book he wanted his grandma to read from so she picked one up at random and opened it. David and Emma were sitting on the small bed still stationed in the corner of the room. Neal's extra cot had been unceremoniously wheeled away on Monday morning.

"How about you head back to the flat and take a bit of time for yourself," David suggested to his daughter. He and his wife were staying at the apartment and he understood the mother's desire to be close to her son but he also could tell Emma needed to get away.

"I'm ok," she lied.

"No, you're not," he said gently. "Your mum and I can watch Henry for a while. Seriously, go and have some time outside of this hospital. It's important you take care of yourself too."

"Regina said that," Emma said, thoughts absentmindedly flicking to the brunette whom she hadn't spoken properly to since Neal had left. She knew they needed to talk, however. She also suspected that Regina was avoiding that talk which was why she only came up to see Henry on her breaks when she had an excuse to return to work ten minutes after arriving.
"Where is Regina?" David asked, oblivious to the thoughts in the blonde's mind. "I barely saw her yesterday. I thought she'd have been up here all the time."

"She's busy," Emma replied. "She comes up when she can. She was here this morning before you and Mum arrived. I expect she'll be up after her shift too."

"She's a keeper," David said, nudging his daughter playfully.

Emma forced a smile. She thought so too. She knew how she felt about the doctor currently working diligently away several floors below them. The only problem was that she didn't know how Regina felt about her any more. There had been something off about every one of the encounters since Regina had walked in on ... whatever it was that may or may not have been about to happen between her and Neal. Except it would never had happened. She wasn't interested in the man and Regina knew that. She felt the anger rise inside her again. Why couldn't the woman just trust her?

"Well, any time you need me and Mum to watch Henry, just ask," David said when Emma had failed to speak for several moments.

Emma nodded her thanks before getting up and moving towards the bed where her son's eyes were closing as his grandma's soft voice soothed him away from the painful, scary world which had become his life. When he was asleep, Mary stopped reading and put the book down, smiling slightly at her daughter.

"Your father's right," Mary said, referring to the conversation she had overheard. "You need to get out of here, darling. It's not good for you to be so cooped up. Let us take care of Henry for an hour. Go and relax somewhere. Do whatever you need to do."

"What makes you think there's something I need to do?" Emma frowned.

Mary just laughed. "Because I know you, dear daughter, and there is something on your mind other than your son. Go and clear your head, work through whatever it is that's putting a frown on that beautiful face and come back to be the best mother this child could ever have hoped for."

Emma rolled her eyes. She was hardly the world's greatest mum. After all, it was her genes which -. No. She stopped herself. She wasn't going to start blaming herself for a biological anomaly she couldn't control despite the fact that it had caused her son such pain and distress. He glanced at her watch. Almost six in the evening. Regina would be getting off work soon.

"Ok, I'll be a couple of hours," Emma said eventually. "Call me if -"

"Nothing is going to happen," Mary said firmly. "Now go. Say hello to that delightful doctor of yours."

Emma nodded and smiled her thanks before bending down and placing a soft kiss to the crown of Henry's head. His skin was still uncomfortably warm and she hoped Zelena would be along soon to give her son his daily antibiotics which were helping his weakened body keep the glandular fever at bay. With a final glance over her shoulder at her family, Emma headed out of the room.

The nurse's station was quiet and Regina looked around in confusion. She was expecting some lab results back for a patient who had collapsed on the Underground but there was no one around. A commotion in the ambulance bay caught her attention and suddenly life exploded into A & E as two stretchers were wheeled in side by side surrounded by hospital personnel.
Regina sprang into action, running up to Doctor Whale and receiving her instructions. She set to work performing chest compressions on the younger victim of what she had been told was a car accident as they were pushed into an empty treatment room. The next fifteen minutes were a blur of activity, shouts and instructions until at last the teenager was stabilised and rushed off to surgery to repair his lung which had been punctured by a broken rib. She took off her bloodied scrubs as she stood beside Whale, watching the youngster disappear.

"Good work," the man praised. "You can take off now. You've already worked past the end of your shift."

"Are you sure?" Regina asked the senior doctor.

"Yeah, see you tomorrow," Whale said, nodding to his colleague before turning back to the father of their patient who was still too unstable to undergo surgery to deal with his own internal injuries. He entered the treatment room and set to work alongside the existing team.

Regina bundled the blood-soaked cloth up and chucked it in a disposal bin as she passed on the way to the staff room. Before she could get there, however, she stopped dead as she noticed who was standing in the corridor which separated A & E from the rest of the hospital.

"Hi," she said quietly.

"Hey, what happened?" Emma asked, gesturing to the bin which contained the bloodied material.

"Car crash," Regina said.

"Are they going to make it?"

"Kid should be OK. Father is still touch and go," Regina said, moving slightly towards Emma. "I was just coming up to see you and Henry actually."

"I figured but my parents told me I needed to get out of SpongeBob land and clear my head so I thought I'd come and find you and save you the trouble."

"It's no trouble," Regina said.

"Yeah but I wanted to see you somewhere other than that room. I mean, I love my son but there are times when it gets too much, you know?"

"I do know," Regina nodded. That was exactly why she had invited Emma to come to her apartment the weekend before. She knew how stressful it was for any parent when their child was ill and Emma's status as a single mother made things momentously more difficult.

"And I think we should talk."

Regina was brought abruptly back to earth with a bump at Emma's final statement. Talk. She too knew she wanted to talk to Emma and suspected the subject matter was the same. Well, actually she wanted to apologise to Emma. After her conversation with Zelena that morning, Regina had realised she owed Emma an apology about the way she had acted. But what did Emma want to talk to her about? Regina's throat constricted uncomfortably as she swallowed.

"Um, give me five minutes to get changed," she offered. "We can grab dinner if you have time?"

"Sounds good," Emma nodded. "I'll wait for you outside."
Night had already fallen, the short winter day giving way to a cold, dark evening. The air was damp, the orange glow of the car park lights lost in the grey sky above. Emma ignored the cold however, grateful just to be out of the hospital room once again. It wasn't long before Regina emerged from the sliding doors and walked to her side. Emma offered her a small smile before they set off together towards the staff car park.

"Where do you want to eat?" Emma asked.

"There's a nice Italian place near here if you like homemade pasta?"

"Who doesn't?" Emma replied as she climbed into Regina's Mercedes.

The drive didn't take long and before they knew it Regina was killing the engine as she pulled up outside a small restaurant. It looked rather empty which, Emma realised, was probably a good thing. The two of them needed somewhere quiet and neutral so they could talk. A waitress showed them to a table and offered them menus. Emma glanced around and spotted only one other couple in the place, seated on the opposite side of the room.

"The ravioli is good," Regina said, breaking the awkward silence which shrouded them as they both perused their respective menus.

"Ravioli it is then," Emma said, snapping hers shut with a grin. She hated making decisions and was more than happy to go on Regina's recommendation. In her experience, the woman had incredible taste in food and wine.

They ordered and as soon as the waitress left in the direction of the kitchen, both women spoke at once.

"I'm sorry."

"I can explain."

They chuckled and Emma waved her hand, encouraging Regina to go first. The brunette took a deep breath and started again.

"I'm sorry about the way I acted on Sunday," Regina said. "And I'm sorry I've not been there for you since. I know you're going through hell and you don't need me and my jealousy in your life right now. I'll understand if you ..." She trailed off, reaching for a sip of water to soothe her parched throat.

"If I what?" Emma prompted.

"If you want to cool things off," Regina admitted quietly.

"Woah, I never said that," Emma jumped in at once. "Regina," she reached for the brunette's hand, "I don't want that."

"You don't?" Regina asked, tears sparkling in her eyes.

"No," Emma soothed. "I want to talk to you, sure. And I want to explain some things to you. But I in no way want things between us to slow down or stop or whatever cool off means."

Regina let out a shuddering breath of relief. Emma squeezed her hand reassuringly.

"Want me to explain what happened on Sunday?"
"Yes please," came the small voice.

Emma already knew what she wanted to say so without further hesitation, she began. "Neal had just
told me he was leaving for Cardiff the following day. We were talking about how we both hoped
he would still be a part of Henry's life. He can't lose his dad now we've found him and I was telling
Neal that I was really grateful for all his help and how he was already becoming a great dad. We
hugged and I think he just misread stuff. I know what it looked like when you came in but I
promise you nothing happened and as soon as you left I shut whatever it was he was thinking
down. I told him I wasn't interested. I told him I was with you. He understands, I think. And even if
he doesn't, Regina, don't you trust me?"

"I do," Regina said at once. "I do trust you, Emma."

"You didn't act like you did," Emma remarked, pulling her hand from Regina's in a more symbolic
move than anything else. She needed Regina to understand she was hurt too. "I feel like you've
been punishing me these last few days for whatever you thought you saw."

"I saw Neal almost kissing you," Regina defended.

"You saw a mother and father who are worried about their sick son," Emma shot back. "Yes,
maybe Neal thought there was something more between us but I never did. You know I'm not
interested in Neal. Hell, I'm not even interested in men. If you hadn't walked in the moment you did
I would just have pushed Neal away if he really had tried anything. But he didn't because you
interrupted us and then started talking about Henry's heart. Was there even anything wrong or did
you just say that to get back at me?"

"No!" Regina explained. "Emma I would never do that to you," she insisted.

"So there is something wrong?" Emma asked.

Regina bit her lip. "I've told Zelena to keep an eye on it," she admitted. "It's probably going to sort
itself out but stem cell transplants can lead to heart problems."

"Henry has a heart problem?"

"No," Regina placated. "Emma, can we just go back a moment? Please know that I'm sorry for the
way I acted when I saw you and Neal together. You know I'm a jealous person and I'm sorry I
wasn't able to control it. I find it hard to see people I really care about with others who might be
trying to take them away from me."

"Neal's not taking me anywhere," Emma said, her fingers now interlaced with Regina's once more.

"No?"

"No," Emma replied. "I'm going nowhere, Regina. And Neal knows that. He's not going to try
anything again. I promise. But you also have to trust me to know how to handle myself when I get
unwanted attention. It isn't exactly something which hasn't happened before."

"Get hit on a lot by men, do you?"

"Sometimes," Emma nodded. "As I'm sure you do. It doesn't mean you fall into bed with them,
right?"

"True," Regina said slowly.
"Then do me the courtesy of believing I won't do that either," Emma said. "The only bed I want to be falling in is yours."

Regina smiled dopily and was about to answer when two dishes appeared in front of them. They thanked the waitress and Emma dug in straight away, suddenly hungry for the first time in days. Regina began to eat too, a huge weight lifted from her shoulders. Emma forgave her. Emma still wanted her. Emma didn't want Neal. She caught the emerald gaze looking curiously at her pensive expression and smiled.

"Come over tomorrow night," Regina offered. "I have Thursday off work and I'm sure either your mum or dad will stay with Henry."

"I'd like that," Emma said.

"It's a date," Regina smiled.

"As is this," Emma pointed out. "Although an impromptu one."

"We're racking them up, aren't we?" Regina laughed. "In spite of all the obstacles, this is starting to feel like a proper relationship."

"It is a proper relationship," Emma said. "We've even had our first fight."

"Fight?"

"Disagreement. Misunderstanding. Whatever," Emma shrugged. "And we talked it out and now we can move on, right?"

"I hope so," Regina nodded. "I want to."

"Good, me too," Emma said. "I also want to bring Henry here when he's better because this ravioli is amazing."

"I'm sure he'll be ready to leave the hospital and running around like a regular, healthy kid in no time," Regina said.

Emma was about to answer when her phone rang. She placed her fork down and reached for her handbag. Pulling it out she felt her stomach flip as she saw her father's photo smiling up at her. She answered at once.

"Dad?"

"Emma, come back," came the choked voice. "It's Henry. Something's wrong."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: and cue anger. Remember, my stories always have a happy ending ...
The Isolation Tent

Chapter Notes

A/N: hi lovelies. Sorry for leaving you in the lurch but thanks for all the awesome messages of hate when I returned to wifi. Here's your next chapter. Angst continues, sorry!

Emma burst into the hospital corridor leading to her son's room and stopped short at the sight which greeted her. Mary and David stood, white-faced, staring at the door through which their daughter had just emerged.

"What's happening?" she asked as she took in their expressions.

"We don't know. We had to leave the room," Mary said rushing forward and meeting the blonde in a fierce, brief hug. "They needed us out of there so they could work."

"Work? On what?"

"He's developed an infection or something," David explained. "I didn't quite understand what Doctor West was saying before we had to get out."

"An infection?" Emma asked, heartbeat pounding against her chest. "Where? From what?"

"We don't know, honey," Mary said. "We were barely in there for two minutes afterwards before the doctors told us to leave."


"Henry woke up and was complaining his chest hurt," David explained. "And then he seemed to be a little confused about where he was. We thought it was just because he was still a little groggy from the sleep but then he stopped responding to us. His eyes went sort of glazed and we realised something was wrong. We pressed that emergency button and Doctor West arrived within seconds. She seemed to know something was wrong straight away when she looked at the machines but didn't say much before she told us to leave."

"His chest?" Emma repeated. "He was confused? Does he have sepsis?" She hadn't been able to stop herself googling the endless complications and problems which could arise from a stem cell transplant and sepsis had been one of the most common causes of fatalities.

"I don't know," David repeated. "We know as much as you do now."

Emma pushed past her parents and went towards the door through which was the little sterile space between her and her son. How had he got an infection? They had been so careful about being hygienic around him. Always wearing a new set of scrubs and booties and washing their hands every time they entered. She placed her palm on the door but before she could open it, another person appeared in the corridor.

"Emma, what's going on?" Regina asked as she hurried towards the family.
"I don't know," Emma said. "Infection, according to Dad but I haven't gone in yet."

"Don't," Regina said. "Not if it's an infection. His immune system will be very weak. David, is Doctor West in there?"

"Yes," the man replied. "They've been inside for about twenty minutes now."

"I need to see him," Emma said, her voice desperate.

"Wait until we know more," Regina advised. "We don't know what kind of infection this is and you might put him at risk by going in now."

"We don't know what's going on because I wasn't here," Emma snapped suddenly, rounding on her girlfriend. "I wasn't here with my son when he got even sicker because I was out for dinner with you." She all but spat the last word. "I thought you said this relationship wasn't going to get in the way of Henry's treatment. Well, look at what's happened now."

Regina blinked, mouth open. Was Emma really blaming her for the fact that her son had fallen ill during their time at dinner? She knew Emma was worried about her son but there was no way she was taking the blame for this. She forced herself to calm down before she answered, however, knowing Emma was speaking as a worried mother rather than her girlfriend.

"Emma, us going out for dinner had nothing to do with Henry. Let's see what's happening before we start to worry. It might be nothing."

"David said Henry complained about his chest, was confused and then didn't respond to them. That's shock. He's got sepsis. He's got blood poisoning and he's going to die," Emma all but shouted at the stunned brunette.

"Hey, don't say that," Mary said, jumping into the argument. "Henry is going to be fine, Emma, and shouting at Regina when she's done nothing wrong isn't helping."

"I wasn't here when Henry needed me because of Regina," Emma screamed, tears flowing freely down her face. "If it wasn't for Regina I would have been here. I would have been with my son. I would ."

Emma dissolved into sobs so wracking she could no longer speak. She collapsed on the floor, body trembling as David and Mary rushed to her side. Regina stood rooted to the spot, her own cheeks streaked with tear tracks. By the time the trio looked up, the corridor was deserted.

"Come on," David said, helping his daughter to her feet. "Let's sit down here and wait for Doctor West to tell us exactly what's happening. Do you want a tea? Coffee? Food?"

Emma shook her head and wiped her eyes on her sleeve. She allowed her father to gently coax her into one of the hard plastic chairs which lined the corridor before leaning forward with her head in her hands. Time dragged by. She barely even registered that her girlfriend had disappeared and any part of her which had was glad. She didn't want to see Regina. She didn't want to see the woman who had distracted her from what was really important. Her son. Sitting stock still between her mother and father, Emma waited for news.

Seconds felt like minutes, minutes felt like hours until, at last, Zelena appeared with a small team, most of whom Emma recognised from their weeks already spent in and out of the hospital. The blonde jumped to her feet the moment the medical staff appeared, looking expectantly at the redhead.
"He's ok," Zelena placated at once, waving her team past her and down the corridor where they scuttled with various trolleys and paperwork.

Emma let out a little moan of relief and sagged against her father's sturdy form. The man himself let out a wavering breath and wrapped his arms around his trembling daughter, offering her some kind of anchor as her entire world was rocked to its foundations.

"What happened?" Emma asked.

"Bloodstream infection," Zelena explained. "Probably from the PICC. We were worried he might have developed sepsis because of his confused state and shock-like symptoms but he hasn't. Exhibiting them usually suggests the infection is much further along than his actually is which is good news. From our initial tests, however, the infection appears to be mildly drug-resistant which is why he contracted it despite us providing antibiotics every day since the transplant. We've put him on a much stronger dose of a different antibiotic, changed his central line which may well have been the source of the infection, and we're stepping up the isolation procedures."

"What does that all mean?" Mary frowned.

"His body is weak at the moment. This infection is aggressive but we're confident we'll get it under control within the next few hours. In the meantime, however, Henry's bed and immediate surroundings are going to be within an isolation tent. We're just going to get one now and we'll set it up. Ordinarily we'd move patients to the ICU but with Henry's low white blood cell count at the recent transplant it's too risky. The best thing we can do is to isolate him where he is."

"Isolate him? So we can't see him?" Emma gasped. The only thing she wanted in the whole world in that moment was to hug her son.

"You can see him," Zelena nodded. "But you can't touch him. You will all have to stay outside of the isolation tent. At least for a week until we have this infection dealt with and Henry's body has strengthened."

"A week?" Emma didn't think seven days had ever sounded so long.

"I'm afraid so," Zelena nodded. "But this is the best thing for Henry. It's the only way to keep him safe while his body recovers."

"But he'll be alone."

"You can all be right outside," Zelena offered kindly. "The isolation tent is see-through so you can see him and talk to him and do everything except touch him."

"Can we go in now?" Emma asked.

"Not until the tent is set up," Zelena replied. "Belle is in there at the moment with him so he isn't alone."

"He must be so scared," Emma whispered, tears leaking from her eyes again.

"He's asleep," Zelena replied. "We sedated him so we could change the catheter and do the tests necessary without causing him any unnecessary distress. He won't be awake for a couple of hours and when he does wake, we'll need to explain to him what's happening."

Just as Zelena finished, two men appeared in sterile suits carrying what could only be the isolation tent. They ignored the group outside the room as they entered. Emma watched them, desperate for
a glimpse of her son but the door swung shut before she could so much as peek inside.

"Any questions?" Zelena asked.

"No," Emma said, her voice a whisper as she sank back into her chair.

"They'll be set up in about fifteen minutes," Zelena said. "Belle will come out to get you when it's safe for you to enter. If you have any questions at any point, please ask me or Belle or Regina."

Emma's eyes snapped up as she remembered something. "The increased heart rate Regina mentioned," she said. "She told me Henry's heartbeat was elevated. Was that because of the bloodstream infection?"

"Yes," Zelena nodded. "She told me she had noticed it as well and we'd been monitoring it closely, looking for any more symptoms. There hadn't been a clear sign that he was infected, however, else we would have acted sooner. His glandular fever would have masked many of the common signs and I suppose we all just missed them. The fact that Regina had pointed us in the direction of an infection made our diagnosis much quicker this afternoon though. Where is she?" Zelena added as an afterthought. "She told me you guys were going to dinner when I saw her earlier."

"We were," Emma replied shortly. "She, um, she left."

Zelena raised her eyebrows but said nothing. She decided she didn't want to get involved in whatever was going on between her patient's mother and her best friend. "Well, I've got to get back to work but please call if you need anything. I'll be back in about an hour to check in. Don't expect him to be awake before then and please, please adhere to the hygiene and sanitation rules we had before. Just because Henry will be in the tent doesn't meant the rest of the room can become in any way compromised. We have to take every precaution necessary. Understand?"

"Yes," three voices chimed.

"Thank you," David added and Mary nodded her agreement to her husband's words.

"No problem," Zelena said, smiling kindly. "He's going to be fine. We caught it early and we're giving him the very best treatment. As soon as we get the blood work back, we'll know for sure that we're on the right path but I'm confident Henry will be back to normal in no time."

"Normal," Emma said wistfully. "I can't even remember what that's like."

The following week was the hardest of Emma's life. She watched through thin plastic windows as her son battled against a potentially deadly bloodstream infection. None of the doctors ever said how close to death her son had come but the moment she had seen him that first evening after his isolation tent had been erected, she had nearly collapsed from shock. He looked so pale, lifeless and utterly alone, encased in his sterile little environment.

It had been awful for all of them to explain to the small, scared six year old that he couldn't have anyone inside with him, that his mother and grandparents were forced to offer their fake smiles through the makeshift windows, their voices slightly distorted. He had cried and cried and their hearts had shattered into tiny pieces as they were unable to do anything to console him. Emma had pressed her hand up against the plastic window and promised him it would be over soon, that he'd be better soon, that she'd never leave his side until he was a healthy little boy again.

And slowly, day by day, the colour had returned to his cheeks. The antibiotics were working and the infection was steadily defeated. Even after Zelena confirmed Henry's blood no longer showed
signs of being infected, they continued to use the isolation tent for a further day. Just in case. Those last twenty four hours were perhaps the worst. So close and yet so far.

Throughout all that time, Regina never appeared. Once, unbeknownst to Emma nor her family, she had pushed the door to their corridor open. But before she had stepped foot inside, she had decided against it and turned back, too hurt and too confused to risk her heart again.

"Mum, you're squashing me," Henry grumbled as his mother's arms encircled his body.

In fact, Emma was practically lying on his bed, so grateful was she to be able to hold her son again. The moment the isolation tent had been taken down she had enveloped him in the tightest hug ever. And now Henry wanted out of that cage too.

"Sorry, kid," Emma said. "I'm just so pleased to see you properly."

"You could see me before," Henry reasoned.

"Yeah but that plastic wasn't the same," Emma reasoned. "And I didn't get to breathe in your smell."

"My smell?" Henry frowned. "I smell?"


"What do I smell like?"

"Happiness."

Henry wrinkled his nose. "That's not a smell."

"Yes it is and it's your smell," Emma reasoned. "Now, can I get you anything? Food, drink, toys?"

"Milk and a sandwich, please," Henry said. Since his body had successfully battled the infection which, according to the doctors, had been in his blood even though his dad's good blood was still inside him and making him better (medicine was confusing), Henry's appetite was returning. At least, to an extent.

David disappeared to get the requested food, leaving Mary and Emma alone with the newly freed Henry. The room seemed bigger to them all now the tent had disappeared and Henry couldn't help but smile as he saw SpongeBob staring down at him, no longer distorted by the plastic barrier.

"Where's Gina?"

"What?" Emma asked, breaking her conversation with her mother about what she needed from the apartment. True to her word, Emma was yet to leave Henry's room, using the attached bathroom and relying on her parents for all outside necessities. When the pair left for Bristol at the end of the week, Neal, who had secured five more days off work, would take over.

"Gina," Henry repeated. "Where is she? I can't remember her coming to see me for ages."

Emma shifted uncomfortably in her chair. She had forgotten how much her son liked the brunette. It had been over a week since she had seen Regina and she had been putting off thinking about their last encounter. Mary had tried to bring it up once but Emma had shut her down. When it came to Henry, however, Emma always told the truth.
"Um, we had a little argument," Emma admitted. "Regina won't be coming up to see you for a while."

"What did you argue about?" Henry asked.

Emma swallowed. What had they argued about? Actually, now she came to think of it, their exchange wasn't exactly an argument but Emma hurling abuse and accusations at a gobsmacked woman who never got a chance to offer her side.

"It's complicated," Emma said lamely.

"Are you going to make up?" Henry asked.

"I don't know," Emma admitted.

"I like Gina," Henry said, unnecessarily.

"I know you do," Emma sighed. "I like her too."

"Then why hasn't she been up to see me in so long?" Henry asked. "Does she not like us?"

"No, no, kid," Emma assured. "Regina likes us lots. At least, she definitely likes you. Me, on the other hand ..." She trailed off. She didn't know how Regina felt about her in that moment. She certainly had every right to despise the woman who had shouted at her in the middle of her workplace. But somehow, to Emma, Regina didn't seem like the despising type.

"Tell her you're sorry and maybe she'll come back."

It was so simple, Emma realised. Life through the eyes of a six year old. She knew she owed Regina an apology. She knew she had said some things she didn't mean. She knew Regina probably didn't want to know the blonde after the way she had acted. But Emma didn't know what she wanted to do, say, feel. She had enjoyed her time with Regina immensely, loved the way she felt when she was with the brunette, treasured their few memories together and yet ... And yet at the moment her life had to be about the little boy before her, sitting up in bed with an earnest expression on her face. She couldn't afford to get distracted, to get swept up in a new relationship. Henry deserved her undivided attention and she swore she was going to give it to him. She hoped Regina would understand that. But first, she owed Regina an apology. Perhaps, if Regina was willing, there was a way for the brunette to be in Henry's life if not Emma's. Not just yet.

"We'll see, kid. We'll see."
Two Moping Women

Chapter Notes

A/N: Wow, you guys are cruel. So much hate for poor Emma! Never say I don’t listen to you and your reviews: here’s her being royally punished. Pun intended.

Facing problems head on had never been one of Emma’s strong suits. She had refused to accept her pregnancy for weeks and it had only been once she had started to show that she had conceded to her mother’s gentle insistences and booked an appointment with her doctor. Even after she had seen the fuzzy moving images and heard the thudding of Henry’s tiny heart in the examination room it had been difficult to accept.

Which was why Emma still hadn’t done the thing she needed to do, despite repeated pleas from Henry and both her parents. The couple had left London the weekend before, replaced by Neal with final hugs and kisses bestowed on Henry and Emma and matching, knowing looks at their daughter when, as she saw them off from outside the hospital, she glanced longingly towards A&E.

Emma hadn’t mentioned to Neal what had happened between her and Regina. The man arrived on Sunday afternoon and was surprised and relieved to see his son sat up in bed and looking considerably chirpier. Emma had, of course, phoned to tell him about the infection and from what she had said, he had been expecting to find his son in far worse condition than when he had left two weeks previous. And yet, after his week in the isolation tent, Henry’s body was getting stronger and stronger. The stem cells were beginning to engraft themselves within his bone marrow cavities and he was brighter, happier and more alert than he had been in over a month. The doctors were confident he was well on the way to recovery.

“Wow, thanks!” Henry had exclaimed when Neal handed over a new set of Top Trumps. “Can we play now?”

“Sure,” Neal had said, perching himself on the bed. “Emma, shall I deal you in?”

“I’m good, thanks,” Emma said. She had been playing with Henry all morning since her parents left and was, finally, thinking of leaving the hospital room and venturing to the canteen before heading home. She knew Neal would be going back to her flat for the night and would rather it was she rummaging through her drawers to get a change of clothes.

And that had been the moment. The first time in two weeks that Emma had stepped into the big wide world outside the hospital. It smelt strange, she decided. And had gotten warmer. It was only February but London was having one its unseasonable moments and the weak sunlight felt invigorating on her cheeks as she strolled to her car. She was quite looking forward to getting back to her apartment for some new clothes as well as to pick up some copies of manuscripts she knew Killian had dropped off. Sometimes she preferred to edit hard copies and her eyes ached from reading on her laptop. That and the vast amounts of antimicrobial cleaning fluids which were used to scrub every inch of Henry’s room daily.

It took a few turns of the key for the yellow bug to splutter to life but when she eventually felt the rumble of its ancient engine beneath her, she gave the steering wheel a hearty pat. As she reversed
out of the space, she neglected to see the sleek black Mercedes driving the other way. Brown eyes, however, couldn’t fail to spot the yellow monstrosity. They narrowed slightly at the sight.

“You’re moping,” Zelena declared as she landed heavily on Regina’s sofa beside the brunette herself on Wednesday morning. The two doctors had just come off their respective nightshifts and Regina had invited her best friend back to her penthouse for some coffee and a general catch up. Regina didn’t generally like to involve Zelena in her love life but it had been well over a week since she had last seem Emma and she needed to talk to someone.

“I am,” Regina admitted.

“What happened?”

“I told you,” Regina replied. “She yelled at me and blamed me for the fact that she wasn’t with Henry when he got sick. She said our relationship got in the way of his treatment, blamed me for what was happening or the fact that she didn’t know what was happening and then collapsed on the floor crying.”

“And you didn’t go to comfort her?”

“I didn’t want to in the moment,” Regina remarked. “I mean, I felt really bad for her. I feel awful about everything she’s had to go through but she’d just shouted all these horrible things at me.”

“She was a mother, desperately worried about her sick son,” Zelena realised. “We’ve all been yelled at in our line of work. It’s the emotions, right?”

“I know that,” Regina replied, a little irritated that her friend didn’t seem to be getting it. “But Emma isn’t the mother of one of my patients. She was supposed to be my girlfriend. You don’t speak to someone you care about like that. Regardless of how worried she was, she shouldn’t have said those things to me. I care about Henry too. Very much. I would never have deliberately pulled her away from him if he had needed her. I mean, none of us saw that infection coming.”

“You did,” Zelena pointed out. “You were the one who spotted that elevated heart rate. I told her you helped us diagnose him, by the way.”

Regina shrugged. “Well, she clearly doesn’t care. She obviously wants nothing more to do with me.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because she hasn’t come down to see me.”

“Have you gone to see her?” Zelena countered.

“I went up to the corridor once,” Regina admitted. “But when I saw that door I remembered all those things she yelled at me. You didn’t see her, Zee. She was so mad. So angry. The way she looked at hurt me. She really did think it was all my fault. I didn’t want to see her. I’m not sure I do now, to be honest.”

“I’m fairly sure you do,” Zelena said softly. “Otherwise we wouldn’t be having this conversation, we’d be planning a big night out so you could get trashed and meet some hot chick.”

“Perhaps,” Regina chuckled. “But I’m not making the first move.”
“Even if it means you don’t see her again? I reckon Emma’s probably pretty embarrassed about how she reacted. Now Henry’s out of the woods and recovering well she’ll be able to look back at the way she treated you. She might feel too ashamed to come and find you.”

Regina swallowed thickly. The thought of never seeing Emma again made her gut twist. She knew she didn’t want that. She knew she wanted to have Emma in her life, even after their relatively short relationship. But that didn’t mean she wasn’t still hurting from the way she had been spoken to, treated, blamed.

“The ball’s in her court,” Regina said simply. “I did nothing wrong and I don’t want to be involved with someone who can’t own up to their mistakes and apologise when they hurt those they’re supposed to care about.”

Zelena reached over and patted Regina’s knee. “Well, for your sake I hope she does it soon. I’ve never seen you so lovesick.”

“Shut up,” Regina said, picking up a cushion and playfully throwing at her giggling friend. “Can we talk about you and Robin now? Is he still obsessed with that feather fetish?”

“No, we’ve moved onto complete sensory deprivation now.”

“What the hell is that?” Regina asked.

“We take it in turns to wear eye masks and ear plugs so we have literally no idea what the other person is doing or even where they are in the room. The other night …”

On Wednesday evening, after Henry had finally fallen asleep after eating most of his dinner and playing a game of junior Monopoly with his parents, Emma and Neal retreated to sit on the cot which had become Emma’s permanent bed. Sitting side by side, they watched their son in silence for a while before they began talking about Neal’s plans. He was returning to Cardiff the following afternoon, needed for the busy weekend nights at the union.

“But maybe the week after next,” he said, consulting his calendar. “Will he still be in hospital?”

“Probably,” Emma said. “They originally said four weeks which would be about right but I think the infection set him back a little. I reckon that will be his last week though. Hopefully.”

“When does Regina think he’ll be discharged?”

It wasn’t subtle and Neal knew that. Emma had made no mention of the brunette since he had arrived four days earlier and her absence had been notable. Henry had referenced her a couple of times, combined with a peculiarly stern look shot at his mother which Emma had pointedly ignored. Neal didn’t have to be a genius to pick up that something had happened. He just didn’t know what.

“I’ll ask Zelena tomorrow,” Emma said, conveniently avoiding the question.

“She’s off tomorrow,” Neal reminded her. “We have Fisher.”

“Then I’ll ask Fisher.”

“Not Regina?”

Emma sighed and turned to look at Neal who gave her a sheepish smile as way of an apology for
his nosiness. “We had a fight,” the blonde offered. “Well, I had a fight.”

“How can one half of a couple have a fight?” Neal frowned.

“I yelled at her. The night Henry got sick,” Emma admitted.

“Oh.”

Emma looked away from the man beside her and back to Henry who was still sleeping soundly. She knew she had promised Henry that she would apologise to Regina. She knew she should apologise. But she wasn’t ready. Not because she didn’t miss Regina. She did. More than she cared to admit to even herself. But Emma knew an apology wouldn’t be enough, not for the way she had spoken to Regina. The two of them had had their disagreements in their young relationship, chief among them being Regina’s jealousy issues. But the way Emma had shouted unjust accusations at the stunned brunette had been reprehensible. She felt her cheeks colour as she remembered what she had said.

“Have you spoken to her?” came Neal’s soft voice.

“No,” Emma replied. “Not yet.”

“Do you want to?”

Emma turned back to Neal. She hadn’t realised quite how close they were sitting. Or had he moved closer? Emma shuffled backwards slightly and averted her gaze, suddenly intently interested in a spot on the floor by her feet. “Yes, I do.”

“Then why haven’t you?” Neal asked.

What was he doing? Emma wondered to herself. Was this him trying to persuade her to go and apologise, grovel, beg for forgiveness? Or was Neal hoping Emma would realise she wanted him instead and would fall into his arms? Surely he wasn’t that stupid. But then there was that time Emma had caught Henry eating candle wax and they did share 50 per cent of the same DNA …

“I wanted to give her time to cool off,” she said eventually.

“Two weeks cool down?” Neal asked. “Careful, she might warm to someone else.”

The mere thought of Regina with anyone else sent Emma’s heart rate soaring. Her blood boiled in her veins as an image of Regina, entwined with a faceless blonde figure swam in her mind. What if she had left it too long? What if the way she had treated Regina was something the brunette could never forgive? What if she had blown it in the heat of the moment. The worse moment of her life, admittedly, when she didn’t know if her son was going to live or die. But regardless of how she was feeling, Regina hadn’t deserved that tirade of abuse Emma had hurled at her.

“Can you stay with Henry?” Emma said, getting to her feet and making the man beside her who, unbeknownst to the blonde, had been leaning forwards, pull back suddenly.

“Um, yeah, sure,” Neal said, a little deflated. “Why?”

“There’s somewhere I need to be,” Emma said, grabbing her purse and gathering up her few possessions. “I’ll be back later.”

“If you’re not, I’ll just kip here,” Neal said. “If you need to … stay the night, go ahead.” Even he knew when he was defeated. It wasn’t even worth trying anything when Emma’s mind was so
clearly on someone else and her heart held firmly in two, slender, olive-skinned hands.

“Do you mind?” Emma asked. “I mean, I might be back in half an hour. This might not go well.”

“If it doesn’t work out, why not go back to yours and have a night in a proper bed. This one isn’t exactly comfortable.” He bounced on the thin mattress and the springs squeaked by way of validation.

“Ok, thanks Neal,” Emma said.

She crossed the room, leaned down to place a kiss on Henry’s forehead, murmured I love you and left. Once out in the corridor, she pulled out her mobile. Her fingers quickly skimmed through her contacts until she landed on the one she was looking for. Pressing the call button, she put it to her ear as she began to walk towards the exit.

The room was pitch black when she was roused groggily from consciousness, a familiar buzzing pulling her from a deep, luxurious sleep. She groped towards her bedside table, blindly seeking the iPhone skittering relentlessly against the hard surface. When her fingers finally connected she dragged it towards her, finger swiping without looking over the screen.

“Hel –?” She coughed, her throat parched, and tried again. “Hello?”

“Shit, I woke you, didn’t I?”

“Emma?” Her brain might still be grappling its way from sleep but she’d recognise the woman’s voice anywhere.

“Yeah, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you.”

“I’m on nights,” Regina said, as way of explanation for the fact that she had been asleep at barely eight in the evening.

“Right,” Emma said. “Sorry,” she said again. Except it wasn’t the apology she had phoned to give.

“It’s ok,” Regina said, sitting up and flicking on her bedside light, bathing the room in a soft glow. “I’m awake now. What did you want?”

Emma winced. Even through the phone she could hear the bite in the words. She knew Regina had every right to be angry and the woman’s little flares of jealousy had demonstrated her passion and fire when it came to relationships. It had been something Emma enjoyed and found attractive. Until it was directed at her.

“Um, I wanted to speak to you,” Emma said, just as she stepped out of the hospital and into the cool London evening. “To apologise.”

“Apologise?”

“Overdue, I know,” Emma replied. “Way overdue. Regina, I’m sorry I … Can we meet? I don’t want to have this conversation over the phone.” There was a pregnant pause and then; “unless you don’t want to see me.”

“No, we can meet,” Regina said at last. “Just give me an hour to shower and get ready. Are you at the hospital?”

“No,” Emma replied. “Neal’s with Henry. I was going to head home and get some more clothes
and then we can meet wherever.” The words somewhere neutral went unsaid. Both women knew meeting in either apartment was a bad idea even if they would have liked the privacy.

“There’s a quiet bar off Mossbury Road,” Regina suggested. “The cocktail one that does ladies night on a Tuesday. I forget the name.”

“Saviour’s,” Emma said, familiar with the joint and wondering briefly how often she and Regina had been in the same venue over the years. More to the point, if that had been the case, why hadn’t she noticed the radiant woman?

“That’s the one,” Regina said, already heading towards her ensuite. “I’ll meet you there at nine?”

“Ok,” Emma nodded. “And Regina, thank you.”

“For what?”

“For agreeing to meet me. For forgiving me for the way I treated you.”

“I haven’t forgiven you yet, Emma,” Regina said before hanging up the call.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Punishment enough?
The Grovelling Schedule

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

Saviour’s was deserted when Emma entered just before nine, a backpack full of clothes slung over her shoulder. The bored bar tender’s face lit up when she saw the patron, relieved the monotony of her night had been broken. Emma declined to order, however, much as she’d have liked to have a drink to steady her nerves, in favour of waiting until Regina arrived. She took a seat at a small, round table and waited, watching the door. Her fresh blouse was dark green and one Ruby had told her made her eyes look incredible. Regina had made a comment before about liking Emma’s emerald orbs.

She had barely been there ten minutes when the woman herself entered. Regina glanced around and spotted Emma at once. Their eyes met, hearts skipped beats. Emma’s eyes drank in the dark skinny jeans and tailored trench coat, pinching in the older woman’s narrow waist. Regina paused for a moment before she walked over and took the vacant seat, shrugging off her coat to reveal a simple black roll-neck.

“Hi,” Emma said softly.

“Hi,” Regina repeated.

But before the awkwardness could continue, the girl came out from behind the bar and presented the two women with their menus. They muttered their thanks and then quickly ordered their staple drinks without even looking at the options. Emma’s was a whiskey coke; Regina took a gin and tonic. Emma couldn’t help but think back to the night in Bristol when they had first kissed. Judging from Regina’s face, the brunette was reminiscing too.

“So,” Regina said when the bar tender had disappeared to fill their orders. “How’s Henry?”

“Great,” Emma said. “He’s doing so great. Zelena is really happy with the engraftment and he’s getting his appetite back. His fever is down too and he’s got more energy again.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Regina said, genuinely relieved, although she already knew from her best friend that Henry’s recovery was back on track.

“Yeah,” Emma smiled. “We think he’s out of the woods now. It was touch and go for a while though.”

“It was,” Regina agreed. She knew how dangerous blood infections could be. She had lost several patients in the past to sepsis, in fact. But –

“I’m sorry,” Emma blurted out. “For what I said that day, Regina. I’m so sorry. I should never have blamed you for the fact that I wasn’t with Henry when the infection showed itself. It wasn’t your fault and I know you weren’t deliberately getting between me and my son. I … yeah, I’m sorry.”
“You hurt me, Emma,” Regina said simply. “You really hurt me.”

“I know and -”

“No, I don’t think you do know,” Regina interrupted. “Because if you had known how much your words hurt you would never have said them. You should never have said them. I care about Henry, Emma. I would never have done anything to jeopardise his treatment and recovery. I even told Zelena to keep an eye on his heart rate and I’m not officially his doctor. I had a feeling something was not quite right but I never thought our dinner that night was going to mean you weren’t there when Henry got ill. And yes, I’m sorry that you weren’t there but you came to find me that night, remember? I didn’t drag you away kicking and screaming. And the second we found out about Henry I drove us back to the hospital as fast as possible. I did everything a good girlfriend could do to be there for you and then you turned around and threw all of that anger and fear you felt right in my face.”

“I was scared,” Emma nodded. “Petrified.”

“I know,” Regina acknowledged. “Having a sick child is a terrible thing for a parent to go through. But that doesn’t mean you take it out on people around you. Especially not those you’re supposed to care about.”

“I lashed out,” Emma said as their drinks were placed before them, the bar tender looking curiously between the two women who were obviously having a very intense conversation. Emma waited for the nosey woman to retreat before finishing what she wanted to say. “I never meant to speak to you like that, Regina.”

“But you did.”

Emma swallowed thickly, the steely look in those usually warm, brown eyes making her stomach clench uncomfortably. Regina was angry with her. Justifiably, Emma knew, but she still wanted to get away from the way the woman was looking at her.

“I did,” Emma nodded finally. “And I shouldn’t have. It will never happen again.”

“It won’t.”

There was another long pause, both women simply sitting and staring at the other, trying to work out what they were thinking. Regina couldn’t deny that she felt some satisfaction in the way Emma was sat nervously across from her. Maybe it was a little vindictive of her but after what the blonde had put her through, Regina didn’t think it was anything less than she deserved.

“Regina,” Emma began after a while, “what happens now?”

“What do you mean?” Regina asked, cocking her head.

“I mean us. What happens with us now?”

“What do you want to happen with us?” Regina countered.

“I missed you,” Emma confessed at once. “So much, Regina.”

“Then why did it take you two weeks to come and find me and apologise for shouting at me in my place of work and in front of your parents?”

Emma winced at the harsh tone even if the words were utterly truthful. She had done that. And she
had waited far too long to try and make amends.

“I was scared,” Emma admitted. “I didn’t know how you’d react to me. I didn’t even know if you wanted to see me. And Henry. He was so sick, Regina. I had to be there for him. Those days with the isolation tent were hell.’’

“The tent came down a week ago,” Regina pointed out. Thanks to Zelena she had been kept appraised of everything when it came to the treatment of Henry Swan.

“It did,” Emma said. “And I probably should have come and found you as soon as Henry was well again.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I was embarrassed,” Emma said quietly. “I’d been trying really hard not to think about the way I spoke to you that first week. I was so ashamed that it was easier to pretend it had never happened. It helped me forget how much I was missing you as well. But when I had to explain to Henry why you weren’t coming up to see him, it all came flooding back and I remembered the way you looked when I shouted at you. I wanted to see you, Regina. I wanted to come and apologise but I didn’t think you’d even want to know. I wasn’t sure you’d meet me tonight to be honest. The fact that you’re hearing me out is more than I deserve. So I suppose the answer to your question is that it took me two weeks to build up the courage. I was a coward. The way I shouted at you was cowardly. I think it all just became too much and I took it out on the wrong person.”

“What became too much?”

“Everything,” Emma sighed. “With Henry being so sick and Neal coming back into our lives, or coming into Henry’s life in the first place. And then you. Everything with you had been so amazing, Regina, and I was loving our time together. But it’s scary, you know?”

“What’s scary?” Regina asked, her own voice softer now.

Emma blushed and glanced around. A couple of other patrons had come in while they had been talking but the place was still empty. And public. This had not been where she had imagined the two of them to be when Emma confessed her feelings for the first time.

“Falling in love,” she all but whispered at last.

Regina’s eyes widened and there was a sharp intake of breath. She had not been expecting that. Well, she might have been expecting it two weeks ago but not now, not in that bar.

“Love?”

Emma nodded. “I think so.”

“But the way you spoke to me,” Regina frowned.

“I know,” Emma said. “Not very loving, was it?”

“Hateful, in fact,” Regina remarked.

“Heated,” Emma corrected. “It was heated emotions which had been building up for too long and you were unlucky enough to be in the line of fire when I snapped. If you hadn’t been there, it would probably have been my mum or dad who had been yelled at.”
“That’s your reasoning?” Regina frowned. “I was in the wrong place at the wrong time? Emma, you told me you blamed me for Henry getting sick.”

“No I didn’t,” Emma protested. “I said it was because of you that I wasn’t with him when he got sicker.”

“Semantics,” Regina shrugged. “You still accused me of something which was not my fault, at least no more than it was yours. And even if you were away from your son at that moment, it doesn’t give you the right to treat other people like that. I mean, is that what you do when things get tough? Shout and scream?”

Emma frowned a little. “You make me sound like I’m five.”

“You act like you’re five,” Regina retorted.

“Extenuating circumstances?” Emma suggested. “You have to appreciate how I was feeling.”

“I do,” Regina said. “Believe me, I’ve spent more time than I would ever want to with parents going through the hell of having a sick child. And on many occasions they’ve shouted at me too. It’s part of being a paediatrician, I’m afraid. But that’s not what I am to you, or Henry. And much as I can understand the fear and the agony of what happened to Henry, I don’t believe you handled it correctly.”

“I didn’t,” Emma agreed. “I handled it terribly.”

“So, what are you going to do about that?”

“What can I do?” Emma asked. “Tell me, Regina, and I’ll do it. I know I don’t deserve a second chance with you but I know I really want one. It’s only been a few weeks but I know we have something special and I really hope I haven’t ruined everything with my hot-headed anger management issues.”

“Nothing will make it right, Emma,” Regina warned. “What you did will always be wrong.”

Emma swallowed thickly again. It was true. There was nothing aside from a time machine which could undo what she had done. Those hurtful words will always have been said, heard, regretted. They were a mistake, Emma knew that. She probably knew it in the moment but with all her thoughts consumed with that of her son, somehow her brain had bypassed rationality and humanity and any other anity which may have prevented her from hurting the person who had been her rock through everything with Henry. And it wasn’t over yet. Henry was still in hospital. He was still sick. Emma still needed Regina.

“Can I make it up to you then?” Emma suggested. “I don’t want this to be it for us. It … it can’t be it for us, can it?”

“I don’t want that either, Emma,” Regina said, offering the blonde a modicum of reassurance.

“You don’t?”

“I don’t,” Regina said shaking her head. “I missed you too. I even came up to the corridor once, a couple of days after … it happened.”

“You did?”

“I wanted to see you,” Regina admitted. “I wanted to make sure you were ok. I know those words
came from a place of pain and I do understand that in the basest sense they were not directed at me. Not really. But then when I got to the corridor I remembered how it felt when you yelled at me and that blazing look in your eyes. It was … it was like you hated me, Emma.”

“I don’t hate you, Regina. I could never hate you. I lo -”

“Don’t,” Regina interrupted. “Don’t say it.”

Emma’s eyes burned with tears. She licked her suddenly parched lips and nodded dutifully.

“Not here,” Regina said, voice soft again. “Not … not yet.”

“Not yet?” There it was again. Another glimmer of hope. Did that mean at some point in the future Regina may permit Emma to voice the powerful emotions she had been experiencing since so early on in their relationship?

“It’s too soon,” Regina said. “I don’t want you to say them as a way of making it up to me. When you, if you, say them in the future, I want you to really mean it.”

“I mean it now,” Emma said boldly.

“You may,” Regina replied. “But then I would always associate them with your apology to me.”

“My apology,” Emma repeated slowly. “So, has that been accepted? I mean, if we’re talking about future circumstances when I might be saying those words to you, does that mean I’m forgiven?”

“Forgiven, not yet,” Regina said. “But I understand and I do want to work through this, Emma. It’s going to take some time and you’ve got some serious grovelling to do.”

Emma laughed. “I can grovel,” she declared. “I’m an excellent groveller.”

“That’s not a word,” Regina replied.

“I invented it. Just for you.”

This time it was Regina’s turn to chuckle and Emma beamed at the familiar noise which had been missing from her life for far too long. “Well, in that case, thank you,” she smiled.

“Another drink?” Emma offered, noticing that Regina’s glass was long since empty, as was her own.

“No, let’s get out of here,” Regina said, gathering up her coat as she spoke.

“Where to?”

“Yours or mine?” Regina asked.

Emma’s eyebrows shot up her forehead. She might have initially been pleased when Neal offered to look after Henry that night but when her apology started off so poorly received, she had given up any hopes of an evening that ended with her arms wrapped behind the brunette’s slender naked form.

“Yours,” Emma said. “I mean, if you want?”

“I’m still hurting, Emma,” Regina said as she stood and shrugged on her coat. “But that doesn’t mean you can’t make me feel good in other ways.”
Regina meant what she said. She was still hurting. She was still angry. She did want Emma to realise how much her words had affected her. But she couldn’t deny how much she had missed the blonde over the previous two weeks. It was Regina who initiated the kiss which began while they were waiting for the lift in the underground parking garage of Regina’s apartment block. Both women had left their respective vehicles and seconds after Regina had pressed the summoning up arrow, their mouths were fused.

The kiss barely broke when the lift arrived and they stumbled blindly into the mercifully empty metal box which soon closed and began to glide skywards. When it arrived in the corridor which led to Regina’s penthouse, they emerged, already breathless. As Regina rummaged in her bag for her keys, Emma’s arms wrapped around her from behind, lips now placing soft, sucking kisses behind Regina’s ear, the only exposed patch of skin thanks to the roll-neck top. The keys rattled against the lock as Regina’s fingers trembled slightly, her body responding to the feel of the blonde after so long apart. Too long apart.

At last the door was open and, within seconds, shut again as Regina was pressed up against it, their kiss now deeper, needier and even more passionate.

“God, I’ve missed you so much,” Emma murmured as she kissed her way up the sharp line of Regina’s jaw to her earlobe. Her tongue swirled around the diamond stud before nibbling the flesh. Regina moaned, her hips rocking forwards into the blonde’s, her centre already burning for contact.

“Show me how much,” Regina panted as Emma released her ear.

Emma pulled back, eyes dark with arousal. She saw the teasing, challenging glint in Regina’s own brown orbs and grinned. “With pleasure.”

“My pleasure, I presume,” Regina said coyly and she followed Emma who was now tugging on her hand in the direction of the doctor’s bedroom.

“Of course,” Emma said over her shoulder.

Regina chuckled. She knew full well that by the end of the night Emma too would be cresting against her fingers and mouth but she appreciated the fact that Emma’s grovelling was going to lead to her own enjoyment first. Several times, hopefully. After all, she deserved it.

“Sit,” Emma said, pointing to the bed while she herself remained standing.

Regina did as instructed and watched with curiosity as Emma pulled out her phone and began looking at the screen.

“Um, how is watching you check Facebook in anyway pleasurable for me?” Regina frowned slightly.

“I’m not checking Facebook,” Emma said. “I’m looking for – aha!” she said triumphantly as music began to play from her phone which she then tossed onto the bed beside the brunette and stood, seemingly waiting.

Regina glanced from the phone and then up to the young woman just as two familiar words filtered through the room.

Ah, alright
“John Legend?” Regina asked. She was a massive fan of the man’s work and knew instantly whose dulcet voice was singing to her.

“I’m impressed,” Emma said as she started to move her hips in time to the music.

Regina’s eyebrows rose higher. “You’re giving me a strip tease?” she asked.

“For your pleasure,” Emma mock bowed just as the lyrics started.

\[
\begin{align*}
Ain’t this what you came for \\
Don’t you wish you came, oh
\end{align*}
\]

Emma added in a little wink for Regina at that as she began to unbutton her own blouse, hips swaying the whole time. Regina rolled her eyes and leaned back on her hands to enjoy the show.

\[
\begin{align*}
Girl what you’re playing for \\
Ah, come on \\
Come on, let me kiss that \\
Ooh, I know you miss that \\
What’s wrong, let me fix that \\
Twist that
\end{align*}
\]

Regina couldn’t help but admit Emma had chosen the perfect song. Sexy, seductive and yet the lyrics were so accurate to their situation. She caught the blouse which was tossed playfully towards her, eyes drinking in the pale body now half dressed before her.

\[
\begin{align*}
Baby, tonight’s the night I let you know \\
Baby, tonight’s the night we lose control \\
Baby, tonight you need that, tonight believe that \\
Tonight I’ll be the best you ever had
\end{align*}
\]

“Tonight’s the night, Regina,” Emma said as she began to push her skinny jeans down her legs. But just as the lyrics ‘I don’t wanna brag’ chimed out, she lost her balance and stumbled sideways. Regina laughed loudly as Emma tumbled against the mattress, her tight trousers now tangled around her ankles. The blonde scowled and yanked the denim away.

“Not funny,” Emma glowered.

“It is a bit, though,” Regina said, still laughing. “Emma, you’re adorable and sexy and that dancing was really hot but you’re a rather clumsy person.”

“I am,” Emma conceded, now sat on the bed beside Regina in only her underwear. “Would you like me to continue?”

“Pleasuring me, yes. Dancing, no,” Regina said, her body already thrumming with want for the almost naked woman beside her. “But leave Legend on,” she added as Emma reached for her phone.

The blonde grinned again and at once pushed Regina down onto her back and swung herself over so she was straddling her hips, hands pushing eagerly at the black material of Regina’s top. Soon her hands were covering the hot flesh of the round globes. But it wasn’t enough. Between them they wrestled the roll-neck off Regina and Emma at once pulled one bra cup down and covered a dark nipple with her hot mouth.

Regina moaned, her back arching off the bed at the sudden sensation. Hands gripped Emma’s
waist, fingernails digging lightly into the smooth skin as she pulled their bodies closer. Teeth grazed over the sensitive flesh, tongue swirling over the area seconds later. She had so missed the taste of the brunette’s skin, the heated feel of their bodies touching. And yet Regina was still half dressed.

Mouth never leaving Regina’s breast, Emma’s fingers quickly undid Regina’s jeans. She had to pull away to remove the tight denim, however, and soon the trousers had been tossed carelessly to the floor, Emma kneeling at the foot of the bed looking up the near naked body of the brunette.

“Beautiful,” Emma murmured, pressing a kiss to Regina’s knee.

Soft eyes looked down at her, dark with arousal and yet also caring and warm. The two of them had a long way to go but Regina couldn’t deny how she felt about Emma. Even after what had been said, her heart still wanted the blonde. And, as Emma crawled up the bed and reached beneath Regina to undo her bra, it seemed like the blonde definitely wanted her too.

With two more kisses to each of Regina’s breasts, Emma placed one final, lingering kiss to Regina’s lips before scooting her way down the bed. The black lace underwear was gone in seconds as Emma settled herself between Regina’s spread legs, eyes feasting on the wet flesh waiting for her. It had been too long, Emma realised, as she lowered her mouth to the aching sex and dragged her tongue through glistening folds.

Regina’s elbows collapsed underneath her at the first touch and she fell back to the bed with a delighted exclamation. Emma’s tongue was hot and wet and touching her exactly where she needed it. Her clit was on fire, Emma’s mouth covering it, teasing it, loving it. She rocked her hips into Emma’s mouth, the need overwhelming. Emma’s tongue began to draw tight, hard circles around the tender nub, stimulating the nerves and gathering more moisture to slicken the process. Fingers threaded through Emma’s hair, pulling her closer. Emma obliged, her mouth working harder, her own fingers digging into Regina’s thighs as she wrapped her arms around them to keep her legs spread wide.

She tongued harder, dipping down to the throbbing entrance and teasingly pressing it inside. Regina loved to be filled but Emma wanted this first orgasm to be achieved with just her mouth. And it was. As Regina came, her core clenched around nothing, Emma’s tongue relentless on her sensitive clit. The blonde never stopped her ministrations, Regina panting and twitching her way through her orgasm. Then, as soon as her body began to relax, two fingers slid smoothly into the relaxed velvet channel.

“Fuck!” Regina cried out as she was filled, a second orgasm chasing the first.

Emma didn’t say anything, she just sucked hard on Regina’s clit, her finger pumping steadily in and out, in and out, in and out. She curled them as she dragged them out, brushing over the soft, spongy wall of Regina’s core. It took less than a minute for Regina to come again, her back arching off the bed as she did so.

This time, Regina pushed Emma’s face away from her, too tender and sensitive for any more stimulation. Emma was reluctant to move from the delectable feast but confident she would get another taste in a few minutes. She wiped her face, which was shining with Regina’s essence, and crawled up the panting woman.

“Ok?” Emma asked, laying her body against Regina’s.

“Yes,” Regina replied, eyes closed. “That was really good.”
“Don’t sleep just yet,” Emma said, brushing a few strands of sweaty hair from Regina’s forehead. “I have more grovelling to do.”

Regina chuckled and Emma’s body jiggled up and down at the movement. The brunette wrapped her arms around the younger woman and pressed a soft kiss to Emma’s lips. They tasted like her, she realised.

“Oh, don’t you worry,” Regina said. “I have more than enough stamina to keep going for a few more hours yet.”

“Great, then come and sit on my face,” Emma said, rolling off Regina and laying beside her.

Regina raised her eyebrow at the crass request but seconds later she had scrambled onto her knees and was climbing on top of Emma.

“Wait, turn around,” Emma said just as Regina was lowering one of her knees.

Regina frowned, hands poised on the headboard. “You want me to eat you out at the same time?” she asked. “I thought this was about my pleasure.” Even as she said it, she felt a renewed flood of wetness at the thought of having Emma’s sex in her mouth once more.

“It is and that’s not what I want to do,” Emma said. “Just turn around, trust me.”

Regina looked sceptical but complied, climbing awkwardly over the blonde until her knees were on either side of the blonde’s head and she was facing down the pale body which, she realised, was still clad with Emma’s matching bra and knickers.

“Like this?” Regina asked, placing her weight on her hands so she was on all fours to keep herself steady. Emma’s covered sex was now less than a foot away from her face.

“Perfect,” Emma said, shuffling the pillow beneath her head to give herself a little extra height. “But I’m not expecting you to do anything to me. This position just allows me better access.”

“Access?” Regina frowned, craning her neck to look back over her shoulder but she couldn’t see the blonde because of her own thigh.

“Access,” Emma repeated before her tongue dragged once more through dripping folds.

Regina gasped at the touch, her sex still tender and yet aching for more. She would always want more when it came to Emma. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feeling of the strong, steady swipes through her folds until, after almost a minute, Emma’s tongue travelled a little further and she let out a squeak of surprise. Emma stopped at once.

“Is this ok?” she asked, breath ghosting over Regina’s skin.

“This was the access you were talking about?” Regina asked, heart thudding. She had only limited experience with anal sex and none of it had been particularly enjoyable.

“If you’re willing, yes,” Emma said. “But if you’re not comfortable then we don’t have to do anything. I just thought you might like it.”

“Do you like it?” Regina asked.

“I do,” Emma nodded. “When I’m with someone I trust.”

Regina pondered the words for a moment and thought about how Emma’s tongue had felt, briefly
flickering over her puckered hole.

“Ok,” Regina said at last. “But go slow.”

Emma nodded and kissed the inside of Regina’s thigh as a thank you for her permission and trust. She craned her neck up and resumed her lapping at Regina’s sex, the folds slick with arousal and tangy on her tongue. Her fingers began to rub the swollen nerve bundle before dipping inside. It was a slightly awkward angle but Emma settled into it and set up a steady, slow rhythm just as her tongue returned to Regina’s ass.

This time, Regina moaned quietly as Emma’s tongue trailed over the entrance. She licked softly, slowly, matching the shallow thrusts of her fingers until she felt Regina rocking back slightly, silent permission for more. Her tongue licked a little firmer, coiling around the rosebud and setting Regina’s nerves on fire. It had never felt like this before, the brunette’s fuzzy brain realised as her body began to spark with delight.

“More, Emma,” Regina panted, suddenly desperate to feel Emma against her ass.

Emma obliged silently, the tip of her tongue, circling even closer and then, slowly, pushing against the tight sphincter. It took a few moments before she was able to enter, Regina’s body slightly resistant but Emma went slowly, her fingers in Regina’s core helping to relax and stimulate her as well. And Emma knew she couldn’t hurt Regina with just her tongue. The brunette cried out as she felt the hot wetness enter her, the forbidden, naughty act bringing her towards her climax embarrassingly quickly. Her fingers gripped the sheets as she felt Emma’s tongue press deeper, flickering inside her ass as the two digits in her sex pushed further too.

“Oh my God!” Regina cried, her body feeling deliciously full. She had never felt like this before when previous partners had touched her there. It had been awkward and painful and embarrassing but with Emma it was simply pleasurable.

She whimpered at the loss when Emma’s tongue moved from her asshole but then sighed in contentment as she felt the tip of one finger replace it, a light pressure applied to her rear entrance.

“Is this ok?” Emma asked before she pushed further.

“Fuck me, Emma,” Regina replied, her body rocking back and the tip of Regina’s finger being forced inside. Both women groaned at the respective sensation and sight. Emma focused on working her finger a little deeper, the two in Regina’s core still moving slowly. She watched as Regina’s body opened to her, accepted her, rewarded her. Once her finger was up to the second knuckle she pulled out lightly and set up a push-pull rhythm with both hands. Regina groaned in delight and fell forwards onto her elbows, mouth now mere inches from Emma’s sex. She could smell her, in fact.

As Emma’s fingers pumped in and out of both her holes, Regina could wait no longer. She tore Emma’s underwear from her body and covered the neglected sex with her mouth. Emma, who hadn’t been expecting the sudden move, gasped in surprised, temporarily distracted from her goal of giving Regina the best orgasm of her life. A nip to her clit brought her back to earth and the fingers resumed their pumping, Regina’s body thrusting to meet them every time. She pressed deeper, pumped a little harder and, by twisting her wrist into an unnatural angle, was able to plant her mouth over Regina’s neglected clit.

The brunette screamed into Emma’s quivering sex as she came. Her body convulsed dramatically and Emma quickly pulled the finger which had been in Regina’s ass free to wrap her arm around the trembling and bucking woman. She held her tightly as wave after wave of pleasure shot
through the older woman, Emma’s name muffled into her own sex as Regina experienced what could only be described as the best orgasm of her life.

When she eventually stilled, Emma gently pulled her other two fingers from Regina’s core and licked them clean. She went to roll Regina from her body but the brunette refused to move.

“My turn,” she said before her mouth sealed once more over the briefly forgotten centre of the blonde. It didn’t take long at all for Emma to come. With Regina’s mouth on her sex and the brunette’s own pink, wet core directly above her, Emma was more aroused than she had ever been in her life. As Regina’s tongue lapped enthusiastically at her core, Emma felt her body coiling tighter and tighter until, at last, she exploded into Regina’s waiting mouth.

When Regina eventually rolled off Emma, she shuffled herself around on the bed so she was lying in the right direction and Emma’s arms wrapped around her at once.

“Wash your hands,” came a sleepy command despite the fact that Regina had curled into her side.

Emma obliged at once, slipping from the bed and padding her way to the bathroom. She washed and soaped her fingers and, for good measure, used the toothbrush she had been allocated on her last visit to brush her teeth. Clean and minty fresh, Emma returned to the bedroom where Regina was lying, completely naked and dozing lightly. Emma pulled the duvet over both of their bodies and cuddled up to her again.

“No one has ever grovelled to me in that way before,” a voice murmured after a while.

“Was it ok that I did?” Emma asked.

“I would have told you if it wasn’t,” Regina pointed out. “It was amazing, actually. Just something I’ve not really done much of before.”

“But you liked it?”

“I did,” Regina confirmed. “More than I ever have in the past. It felt different with you, better with you.”

“I’m glad,” Emma replied. “Because I liked doing it to you?”

“You did?” The tone was slightly sceptical

“You think I’m weird?”

“No,” Regina said, now resting her chin on Emma’s chest and looking up at the young woman. “But it’s interesting. I like learning what my partners enjoy in bed. Sometimes they like to do to me what I do to them and other times they don’t. I mean, do you like anal play performed on yourself?”

“I like hearing you say anal,” Emma said, eyes darkening. Regina laughed and placed a kiss to Emma’s warm skin. “And yes, sometimes. When the moment’s right. I think I prefer giving rather than receiving though.”

“Well it appears I am happy to receive,” Regina said.

Emma grinned and leaned down to kiss Regina’s lips softly. “I’ll build it into my grovelling schedule then,” she said when they broke apart.
“You have a schedule?”

“Oh yeah,” Emma nodded. “When I’ve been as much of a dick as someone I care about as I have been to you, scheduling in regular grovel opportunities is essential.”

Regina laughed. “You’re mental.”

“Perhaps,” Emma conceded. “But you deserve it.”

“A mental girlfriend?”

“A proper apology,” Emma corrected. “And am I still your girlfriend? I mean, I know I’ve got some more of my grovel schedule to get through before I’m back in your good books but am I doing such grovelling in the capacity of your girlfriend?”

“I don’t usually let non-girlfriends touch me the way you just did,” Regina pointed out. “And yes, Emma. Despite everything that has happened, we’re still together. I may take some time to get over what happened but I want to and I will. Just, stick to the grovel schedule, ok?”

Emma chuckled and kissed Regina again. “Ok, then take a nap now because in an hour we have another grovel sex session coming up.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: see, look at your friendly neighbourhood author listening to you again! Hope you guys liked it. They’re on the right path again; it’s just going to take a while to get back to where they were. Well, probably about 7 chapters worth of while …
Chapter Notes

A/N: sorry for the delay! Thanks for the awesome feedback on the last chapter. In reference to the seven more chapters, I was referring to the length of the entire story, not Emma’s grovelling schedule …

“Mum!” Henry exclaimed when the blonde appeared in the hospital room the following morning. “And Gina!”

At the second exclamation, Neal looked around from the chair he was sat in, reading to his son, eyes slightly widening as he noted the brunette stood beside Emma.

“Hi Henry,” Emma said. “Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah, and Neal let me have chocolate for breakfast,” he enthused.

Emma glanced at the man who looked a little sheepish but mouthed thank you at him none-the-less. If it hadn’t been for Neal, she wouldn’t have been able to make amends with Regina. Or at least begin to make amends. There were still many appointments that needed to be attended in the grovelling schedule.

“Hi Henry,” Regina said, moving up to the bed and smiling down at the boy. She hadn’t realised how much she had missed him until that moment. She suddenly felt a wave of guilt at the knowledge that her fall out with Emma, justified as it was, had kept her away from Henry at the same time.

“You came back,” Henry said. Regina’s heart clenched; she had never meant to leave him. He had just been collateral damage to a stressful situation, along with her heart. Judging by the wide smile the boy gave her, however, Henry wasn’t one to hold a grudge. “Did Mum say sorry?” he asked.

“She did,” Regina nodded, smiling sideways at the blonde.

“I have to say sorry when I shout too,” Henry said.

“Everyone does,” Emma said. “But some of us have to say sorry lots.”

“Because you shouted lots?”

“Pretty much,” Emma nodded, unable to fault her son’s logic. “And luckily for me, Regina is a very nice person and accepted my apology.”

“You’re a good apologiser,” Regina smirked. Emma’s eyes darkened and she licked her dry lips without conscious thought.

Neal, realising what the two women were thinking about, cleared his throat and rose from the chair. “Um, I’m gonna take off back to yours, Emma. I didn’t bring a change of clothes so I wanna go and shower and get something new to wear before I pack and catch the train. Are you ok here?”
“Yes, of course. And thank you again, Neal. You’ll come back before you leave right?”

“Train isn’t until two thirty,” he confirmed. “I won’t be long.” The man nodded, offered Regina a brief smile before disappearing from the room. Emma and Regina took their usual seats and Henry grinned at the familiar sight which had been missing from his hospital room for far too long.

“Can we play a game?” he asked.

“Of course,” Emma nodded. “But how about something more nutritious for breakfast than chocolate first?”

“Chocolate is a vegetable though.”

Emma and Regina exchanged glances. Emma shrugged and Regina quirked her lips questioningly.

“Explain please,” Emma said, turning back to her son.

“It’s made from beans,” Henry reasoned. “Neal told me. He said chocolate was healthy because it came from cocoa beans. They’re like baked beans but not and then they make them into chocolate. Baked beans are healthy. And green beans. So chocolate is healthy too. That’s what Dad said.”

Emma didn’t know what she was more stunned by. Her son’s hilarious reasoning or the fact that he had, for the first time, referred to Neal using the D word. She decided to focus on the former because the latter was too big to deal with. Of course, Neal was Henry’s father and he had been incredible over the past month. But that didn’t mean Emma was quite ready to hear her son refer to him as such.

“Um, Henry, that’s not quite how it works,” she chuckled. “I like your thinking but chocolate isn’t healthy. They add lots of sugar and milk to the beans and I’m afraid there’s no way you could claim chocolate is a vegetable.”

“Well, studies have concluded that dark chocolate can be good for you in small doses,” Regina piped up.

“True, there’s much less sugar added. Do you want some dark chocolate, kid?” Emma asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

Henry glowered. He hated dark chocolate. Emma and Regina laughed a little before the blonde reached for the Top Trump cards Neal had bought from Cardiff and beginning to shuffle them.

The trio played for over an hour before Neal returned. He joined them for a while before Regina had to leave. It was her first full day off in five days and she had errands to run. She promised to come back later in the day however and departed reluctantly after a chaste kiss from Emma. As she walked out of the hospital, Regina knew the blonde was already well and truly forgiven. It didn’t mean what Emma had done had been acceptable and those words still hurt. They would always hurt. But Regina had forgotten how much she liked the blonde. She hadn’t even realised how much she had missed spending time with Emma and Henry when they had been apart. She had missed them, sure, but she had been hurting, angry, resentful. Now, however, she couldn’t wait to get back to her girlfriend and hurried off towards the supermarket, counting down the minutes until they were together again.

“So, it went well, I take it? Last night, with Regina?” Neal asked when Henry had finally fallen asleep after lunch. The boy had far more energy than he had had for months but he was still sick and his body was still recovering. The glandular fever, also, continued to niggle away and so he
always took a nap in the early afternoon.

“‘It did,’” Emma said, a dopey look on her face. “It’s going to take a little more time, I think. But yeah, she’s accepted my apology.”

“Good,” Neal said. “I’m really happy for you, Emma.”

“Really?” the blonde asked. “You’re really happy to see me back with Regina.”

Neal shrugged. “I think it’s fairly clear to see you’re never going to be interested in me again. And yes, I want you to be with someone who makes you happy. And I’ve seen how Regina is with Henry. It’s obvious she loves him.”

“I think she does,” Emma said, smiling over at her son who was oblivious to the conversation. “And I know he loves her to pieces.”

“So do you,” Neal remarked.

Emma nodded her head in agreement. She may not have said those words to Regina yet. She may not have been allowed to. But that didn’t mean she didn’t feel that way. And Regina knew it. One day, sometime soon, Emma would tell her. She wondered whether she’d hear the words back.

“I’m gonna head off,” Neal said, pulling Emma from her thoughts.

“Already?” Emma asked. “Don’t you want to say goodbye to Henry?”

“I did that when you were in the toilet,” Neal said. “I said I’d be back after next weekend. He asked me if he’d still be in hospital, by the way. I said I didn’t know.”

“Thanks,” Emma sighed. She hated the fact that her son was spending so long cooped up, even though she knew why it must be the case. “I’ll ask Zelena when she’s back to see what timescale we’re looking at. I don’t want to get his hopes up and then have to tell him he’s got to stay longer. He doesn’t need false hope. Whether we’re here or at home, I’ll keep you posted.”

“And if he’s home, am I ok to kip on the sofa?”

“Of course,” Emma smiled. “Honestly, Neal, you’re always welcome at ours. You’re Henry’s dad, remember?”

“Do you think he’ll start calling me that?”

Emma hadn’t told Neal what Henry had said that morning. She thought it might be best for him to hear the words from the child himself. She doubted it was too long before Henry simply switched over from Neal to Dad all the time.

“I’m sure he will,” Emma said. “Just make sure you stick around to earn the title, ok?”

“You know I’m in this for the long haul now, Emma,” Neal said. “I mean, look at him. He’s just incredible. How could I walk away from such a brave, funny, bright little kid?”

“Good point,” Emma said. “He’s pretty amazing.”

“Because of you.”

“And you,” Emma added. “You’re fifty percent of him, remember.”
“Yeah but you raised him.”

“From now on, I think we’ll both be raising him,” Emma said.

“Yeah?” The hope in Neal’s voice was unmistakable.

“Yeah.”

By the time Regina returned, a dry cleaning bag draped over her arm, Emma was dozing beside Henry’s bed. The small boy himself was sat up watching the television on a low volume. He grinned and waved when he saw Regina and the smile only grew wider when she produced some fresh orange juice and a cookie.

“Thanks,” he said. Hospital food, he had discovered, wasn’t great. And any of the half-decent meals were already becoming boring. He wondered whether Regina would cook him some more lasagne if he opened his eyes really wide in the way that always worked on his mum when he asked for something. “What did you go to do?”

“Lots of boring grown up things,” Regina whispered, glancing at the still sleeping blonde. She wasn’t surprised Emma was tired, given that the two of them had not exactly slept much the night before due to Emma’s busy grovelling schedule. She herself had dozed off on the Tube and only the jolting of the carriage when it arrived in the station had stopped her missing her stop.

“Like what?”

“Like for more food shopping and picking up my dresses from the dry cleaners and visiting my parents.”

“Where do your parents live?” Henry asked, mouth now full of cookie.

“In Chelsea.”

“Oh, are you rich?” Henry didn’t know much about London but he had heard his mum and Ruby talking about that area of the city. It was where the snooty people lived, apparently.

Regina couldn’t help but chuckle. “My family has money, yes.”

“Did your mum cook you lunch?”

“No, we went out for afternoon tea,” Regina said. “My dad had a meeting with someone in town so we met just off Regent Street and then my mum went shopping and I came here.”

“That’s where Hamley’s is,” Henry said. “Did you buy me a toy?”

“Henry, that’s rude,” came a sleepy voice as Emma cracked an eye open and joined the conversation. “Hi,” she added to Regina.

“Hi,” the brunette said with a smile. “And it’s ok. No, Henry, I didn’t. I’m afraid I didn’t have time. Plus you already have quite a lot of toys here, don’t you?” She indicated the tower of toys, games and books which were heaped on his bedside table.

“Yeah but I’m sick.”

Emma laughed. “Not so sick that you can’t eat cookies though. Did you say thank you for that?”
“Yeah,” Henry said.

Sceptical, Emma turned to Regina. “He did,” she confirmed. “And I brought you one too.” Emma smiled as her girlfriend handed over the treat. “Aren’t you going to say thank you?” Regina teased when a large bite was taken at once.

“I was going to thank you later in ways that aren’t currently appropriate,” she said, crumbs falling from her lips, “but for Henry’s sake, thank you, Regina. This is delicious.”

Regina wanted to be appalled by the manners of the blonde but she couldn’t be. It was just too good to have Emma back in her life again. She was also already thinking about how Emma might thank her. Two weeks without sex with her girlfriend and now it was all Regina could think about. That said, she hadn’t exactly not though about it during their time apart. Regardless of how angry and hurt she was, Regina’s brain had other ideas when she was asleep. Emma had featured in more than a few risqué dreams.

“How were your parents?” the unknowing blonde asked when she had finished the cookie.

Regina forced her mind away from recalling a particularly enjoyable dream from which she had awoken hot and flustered the week before. “Good, thanks. They asked about you.”

Emma, who had been taking a swig of water, choked. Eyes watering, she thumped herself on the chest several times before managing to splutter out “what?”

“They asked how you were,” Regina elaborated. “You and Henry.”

“They know about us?” Emma said, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand.

“Um, yes,” the brunette said slowly. “I mean, your parents know about us, right?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t think … I mean, no, I guess you’re right. Of course you’ve told them.”

“Is … was that not ok with you?” Regina frowned. “I mean, were we supposed to be keeping our relationship quiet? I know we said we should keep a low profile in my place of work but my parents don’t seem to be affected by that rule.”

“I just hadn’t really thought about them, to be honest,” Emma said. “I mean, it’s just a bit weird to think that Herbert Mills knows I’m dating his daughter. And that he knows about Henry too. Did you tell him Henry was sick?”

“Of course. That’s how we met, remember?” Regina said, glancing at the boy who had lost interest in the conversation happening over his bed and started watching television again. “And he’s a retired politician, Emma. He’s no one to be scared of.”

“He’s a pretty awesome guy,” Emma pointed out. “I mean, most politicians are stuck up prats, but he’s cool. Down to earth, made some real changes and genuinely listening to his constituents, you know?”

Regina grinned. She did know. She could understand why Emma was a little unnerved about the fact that Herbert Mills was her father. He had been a pretty cutting edge politician in his day and had actually made a difference when he been in office. It was just a shame the current government were working diligently to undo all that work.

“Tell him that when you meet him. I’m sure he’d be delighted to hear from a fan.”
Emma narrowed her eyes. “You make me sound like a groupie.”

“Pretty sure politicians don’t have groupies but if they did, I don’t think you can deny you would be one. Don’t worry, it’s cute.”

Emma glowered and then suddenly her eyebrows shot up. “Meet him?”

“One day,” Regina placated. “Don’t worry, I haven’t invited them around for a family dinner just yet.”

Features softened, Emma glanced at Henry and then back at Regina. “Family?”

Regina blushed. She hadn’t meant that. It was too soon. They hadn’t been together that long. Emma was still making up for her actions two weeks earlier. Henry was still sick. They hadn’t even said those three words yet. Yet. But she had still said the ‘f’ word. Despite everything. Despite all of the challenges and all of the complications and the fact that her beautiful, hot-headed, stubborn, complicated and utterly adorable girlfriend had said those things in that corridor, there was no doubt how Regina felt about Emma. And Henry.

The Swan Family had consisted of just two people for as long as it had existed. Just Emma and Henry. That was all they needed, with a sprinkling of grandparents every now and then and a spoonful of Auntie Ruby. But for the most part, it had always been the two of them. Emma and Henry. Henry and Emma. They hadn’t needed nor wanted anyone else, especially not after what had happened the last time they invited someone to join their family. And yet, as Emma’s eyes met chocolate brown across her son’s bed the blonde wondered whether, perhaps, it was time to offer someone else the chance to join them.
A/N: so sorry for the delay! I moved house and it just got a little crazy. I’ve put in a time jump here because I wanted to move the story along. There will be 40 chapters in total for this fic, by the way. This one is NSFW.

“It smells different,” Henry said, standing in the doorway and looking around, nose wrinkled.

“Yeah, it doesn’t smell like hospital,” Emma joked, squeezing past her son and dumping his bag on his bed. “Nice, right?”

“Different,” Henry repeated.

He followed his mother and sat down on his bed, the frame creaking in a familiar way as he did so. Glancing around his bedroom, Henry tried to remember what it had smelt like last time he had been there. The six weeks in the hospital had all but wiped his memory of life before he got sick.

“How are you feeling, kid?” Emma asked, crouching down in front of her son. “Is it good to be home?”

“Yeah,” Henry said with a smile. “It’s good.”

“Are you tired?”

“No,” Henry said, shaking his head. He may have been allowed to leave the hospital but his body still had a long way to go before he was fully better. For now, however, he was feeling wide awake and happy to be home at last. It was just a shame his dad had gone back to Cardiff the previous week and wasn’t there as well.

“Come on,” Emma said, reaching for the bag she had just discarded. “Let’s unpack and then we can get started on dinner. Regina will be here in an hour.”

Henry obediently slid from the bed and began to put his clothes back in his wardrobe, his mother helping him to fold his t-shirts properly. They were finished in five minutes and headed out into the kitchen. Which was where Regina found them when she let herself into the apartment almost an hour later. Emma had given her a key the week before when Regina had offered to return to Emma’s to pick up some clean clothes and the blonde had insisted she didn’t need to give it back.

“Gina!” Henry exclaimed when he spotted the brunette. “We’re making pizza.”

“Awesome,” Regina said, placing a soft kiss to Henry’s head and then craning over him to peck Emma’s cheek too. “Can I have pepperoni on mine, please?”


“Oh that sounds delicious,” Regina said. “Can you put some on mine as well please?”
The small boy nodded but frowned, as if he couldn’t quite understand why an adult would want to eat vegetables if they weren’t being forced to by their mother.

“How was the rest of your shift?” Emma asked as she spooned out tomato sauce onto the supposedly round pizza bases Henry had rolled out for them.

Regina had come up to see Henry off when he was finally discharged from the hospital that afternoon but had been unable to travel back to the apartment with the family as she still had to finish her shift. Emma had insisted she come over for dinner, however, and Regina was more than happy to oblige. The two of them hadn’t spent much time together since Neal had left the weekend before. Regina realised that although she disliked the way he looked at Emma sometimes, his visits did allow Emma to have the occasional night off from the hospital. Now Henry was home, Regina supposed she would just have to spend more time at the apartment in order to see her girlfriend. She didn’t mind that prospect one bit.

“It was busy,” Regina said. “Fridays appear to encourage clumsiness, apparently. I’m glad it’s over.”

“And now you’ve got two days off,” Emma added.

“I do,” Regina said. “And I know exactly who I’m going to spend them with.”

“Who?” Henry piped up.

“You, of course,” she said, tapping his nose and smiling. “And your mother.”

“In that order?” Emma asked, smirking.

Regina laughed. “Perhaps. I mean, you’re not the one we’re celebrating being home after six weeks in the hospital, are we?”

“True,” Emma conceded. “This weekend should be all about my little prince.”

Henry scowled. He didn’t like that nickname or crowns. “Can we go to the park tomorrow?”

“If you’re feeling well enough, yeah,” Emma said. “That’s ok, isn’t it, Doctor Regina?”

“You should take things steady but yes, Henry, if you want to go outside and play for a bit I think that would be good,” Regina nodded. “I can understand you wanting to go and play with your friends.”

“Can Neal come and play too?”

“He’s in Cardiff, remember, kid?” Emma said.

“But he could come tomorrow,” Henry reasoned.

“He has to work, Henry,” Emma reminded her son gently. “He’s coming next week, isn’t he? He told you last time he was here that his dad wanted to meet you too and they’re both coming up next Wednesday.”

“That’s ages away,” Henry whined. “I want to see Dad now.”

There was that word again. Henry was yet to say it directly to Neal but it was ever more frequently being used to refer to the man whenever he wasn’t around.
“I’m sorry, kid,” Emma said. “You’ll have to make do with me and Regina.”

Henry huffed his annoyance and began placing pepperoni slices down on the pizza bases his mother had finished preparing. Emma glanced at Regina over his son’s head. The brunette simply shrugged. She didn’t have the first clue about parenting and she was certainly out of her depth when it came to advising Emma on her son’s relationship with his newfound father.

“So, I hear the weather is going to be really nice tomorrow, Henry,” Regina said, trying to change the subject. “How about we take a little picnic to eat in the park?”

They were only a few days into March but the weather was unseasonably warm. Already daffodils were poking their yellow heads out and brightening up the grey streets and Emma was looking forward to spending some time outdoors. One of her favourite summer activities was going to the park with Henry and reading through a new manuscript while he played in the sun. Regina’s suggestion reminded the blonde of her mounting workload. While Killian had been incredibly understanding about Emma’s inability to complete her usual tasks, she knew she would need to return to the office sooner or later.

Henry coughed a little and Emma shot him a worried look. He caught her and rolled his eyes. “Mum, everyone coughs,” he said, exasperated. “It doesn’t mean I’m sick, right Gina?”

“True,” Regina nodded. “But your mum is just worried about you still. It’s going to take a few more months before you’re completely fit and healthy again.”

“When can I go back to school?”

Emma glanced at Regina. It wasn’t a conversation the blonde had had with her son yet. She knew Henry enjoyed his time at school, which he had only started the previous September. He had lots of friends and he liked his teacher too. Emma wondered how much the past two months would have set her son back developmentally. If he had been well enough, she would have tried to teach him some basic maths and reading in the hospital, but until a couple of weeks ago, that would have been too much. She supposed now he was home she might need to start making a conscious effort.

“Well, that depends on you, really,” Emma said, looking back down at Henry.

“Why?”

“Because we don’t want to make you go back before you’re ready and you feel strong enough,” Emma explained.

“I’m ready now,” Henry said. “I want to see Roland and Nick and Peter and Mrs Jenkins.”

“I know you do,” Emma said with a sad smile. “But your body is still a little bit sick, remember? If you go back now, you might get ill again.”

“When can I go back then?” Henry asked, turning to Regina who, as the doctor, he presumed had the answer.

After a nod of ascent from Emma, Regina tried to explain. “Your body is doing really good work with that healthy blood Neal gave you, Henry, but it takes some time before you can be around lots of people again. Remember when you were in that funny tent?” Henry nodded. “That was because if you’d been touched and hugged by your mum or grandparents or me, you might have gotten sicker. Now, you don’t need to be in the tent any more. You don’t even need to be in the hospital because you’ve gotten so much stronger. But if you go back to school, then your body will have to work really, really hard to stop you getting sick. In your class there are 25 other little boys and girls
and they all have different germs on them which could make you ill again. We want your body to focus all its energy on making you well again first. Do you understand?"

“So … when can I go back?” Henry asked again. He had understood Regina’s explanation but it didn’t contain the number he really wanted to know.

“When your body is strong enough,” Regina said. “Maybe in two weeks. Or a month. It depends. We’ll need to talk to Doctor Lena first and then -”

Regina was interrupted by a clattering and familiar shout from the living room before, seconds later, Ruby appeared in the kitchen.

“Henry! My little man! You’re back,” the red head cried, rushing over and scooping the boy into her arms.

Henry shrieked and giggled as his Auntie Ruby swung him round, peppering his face with kisses. Emma grinned as she watched. She had missed seeing her best friend and her son together. They had all decided to limit her visits to Henry when he was in hospital but Emma had texted Ruby earlier that day to confirm he was getting discharged.

“Auntie Ruby!” Henry panted as he was set back down on the chair he had been standing on to reach the kitchen counter. “Are you staying for dinner? We’re making pizza.”

“Is there enough for me?” Ruby asked, glancing at Emma.

“Sure,” Emma said. “Let me just roll out a little more of the base and we can make one for Auntie Ruby too. Henry, can you pass me the rolling pin please?”

“And how are you, Regina,” Ruby asked, turning to the woman who was standing on the other side of her ‘nephew’.

“I’m good thank you, Ruby,” Regina said. “Just come off a four-day rotation so I’m pretty tired but looking forward to my weekend with these two.”

“Yeah? What are your plans now Master Henry is home?”

“We’re going to the park tomorrow for a picnic,” Henry said. “Can you and Billy come?”

“I’m sure we can,” Ruby grinned. She had missed running around with the small boy. He gave her an excuse to act like a child without anyone looking at her like she was crazy. She loved to play around and run wildly without a care in the world. “Hey, Henry, I have a present for you.”

“What is it?” Henry asked, turning away from the pizzas onto which he was supposed to be sprinkling cheese, distracted at the prospect of a gift.

“Come and find out,” Ruby said, helping him down off the chair and leading him into the living room.

“Woah!”

Emma and Regina exchanged curious looks and followed Ruby and Henry who had disappeared. They rounded the doorframe to see Henry staring reverently at a shiny new bicycle, training wheels in place and a blue helmet perched on the seat.

“You bought him a bicycle?” Emma asked, gobsmacked.
“Well, I wanted to get him a motorbike but Billy said he was too young,” Ruby quipped. “It’s ok, right?”

Emma said nothing. She just wrapped her arms around her friend and squeezed tightly. “Thank you so much!”

Henry had asked for a bicycle at Christmas but Emma hadn’t been able to afford it after having to pay for some significant repairs to her bug. She had forgotten she had mentioned that to Ruby and felt tears prick her eyes at the thoughtfulness. Regina’s arm slid around her waist as the three adults watched Henry walking slowly around the bicycle, taking in every inch of its pristine frame.

“Can we go to the park now?” he asked excitedly.

“Kid, it’s dark,” Emma laughed, pointing to the windows. “Tomorrow, ok? And what do you say to Auntie Ruby?”

Henry ran up to the redhead and hugged her legs. “Thank you Auntie Ruby. This is the bestest present ever!”

Ruby smiled and patted his head. “You’re welcome, Henry. I’m just really glad you’re getting better. It was a little bit scary back then, you know? We were all worried about you and we’re really happy you were so strong and brave. Now you’re getting healthy again, I thought it was time you learned how to ride a bike.”

“Can you teach me, Mum?” Henry asked.

“Of course,” Emma said.

“And Ruby and Gina can help teach me too,” Henry added.

“We sure can,” Ruby said, smiling at Regina.

“Um, well, actually, I can’t ride a bike,” Regina admitted.


“I don’t know,” Regina shrugged. “I just never got around to it, I suppose. My family were so busy and I was always more of a city girl than one who wanted to spend time in parks anyway. I regret it now but I guess it’s too late.”

“Never,” Emma said. “I’ll dig out my old bike and we can teach you tomorrow too.”

Regina looked sceptical but Emma looped her arms around her waist and placed a soft kiss to her nose. “You can do this, I’m sure of it.”

“Yeah, Gina,” Henry piped up. “If I can learn and I’m only six, then you can learn too because you’re old.”

“Older,” Regina amended with a laugh. “And ok, I’ll give it a try.”

The next morning, Emma stood, bathed in warm sunlight, hands on hips as she surveyed her bicycle. It had not been used since the previous summer when, for one week, she had gone on a fitness spree and cycled regularly. But then she had lost interest and the bike had been parked in the allotted space beside her apartment block, only partially protected from the rain. The chain was an ominous orange colour and she had coughed as she dusted off the saddle. Both tyres were flat.
“Don’t worry,” Regina said from beside her. “I’ve managed this long without knowing how to ride. I’m sure I’ll survive the rest of my life.”

“No, you need to learn,” Emma huffed. “Plus, Henry’s super excited about the two of you learning together.”

The boy in question was still inside with his Auntie Ruby and Billy, trying to decide which shoes he should wear to learn his new skill. Emma assumed it was more about the fact that he got to wear shoes and clothes other than a hospital gown that he was most excited and indecisive about.

“Well, if you can get it going, fine,” Regina said, folding her arms and smiling in a challenging way.

“I can get it going,” Emma defended, crouching down and turning the pedals backwards. The chain bunched, sagged and slid off the cogs. “Oops.”

Regina laughed. Emma stood back up and scowled just as Emma, Ruby and Billy emerged from the building behind them.

“Mum! Look!” Henry called, gesturing to his mother to check out his chosen outfit which consisted of jeans, a bright green sweater and the trainers his grandparents had given him for Christmas, barely used thanks to his illness. Atop his head perched a helmet, glinting in the sun.

“Wow! You look great, kid,” Emma said, walking towards him and taking the bike from Ruby who was carrying it one handed. “But I’m afraid you’re going to be flying solo today. My bike is a little bit broken so Regina won’t be able to learn as well.”

“Oh,” Henry said, looking crestfallen.

“I can fix this,” Billy said, giving the bike a once over. “Give me ten minutes and it’ll be good as new.” Without another word, he headed back into the apartment for his toolkit.

“We’ll meet you there,” Ruby called after him, knowing Henry would be too impatient to wait and also being aware that he was still not supposed to be doing too much too soon. This was already going to be a short trip.

Emma and Regina’s fingers laced together and, with Henry’s bicycle wheeling alongside them, they set off on the short walk to the park, Ruby and Henry ahead, chattering all the while.

By the time Billy appeared, riding Emma’s newly fixed bicycle, Henry was already getting the hang of peddling. His fists clutched the handles and his tongue stuck out in concentration as he made his way slowly along the path, Emma, Regina and Ruby all walking by his side.

“Looking good, Henry,” Billy said as he rode up beside them and pulled a wheelie.

“Woah!” Henry said, eyes wide at the move as his bike slowed to a stop after he forgot to peddle. “Can I do that?”

“No yet,” Emma laughed. “Now, can you set off again on your own or do you need a push?”

Once Henry had resumed his movement, with a helping nudge from Regina, the five of them continued for a while, Billy peddling slowly alongside. As Henry grew more confident, Emma asked Ruby to take over so she and Regina could give the bigger bike a go.
“It’s easy, Gina,” Henry said, looking back over his shoulder and steering straight into Ruby’s leg. “Oops, sorry,” he added as Ruby hopped on her uninjured foot and tried hard not to curse.

Billy dismounted, unclipped the helmet and handed both to Regina who took them, looking apprehensive. After the man had hurried after his girlfriend, Emma turned to Regina with a big smile.

“Safety first,” she said, pulling the helmet from Regina’s hands and putting it on her head.

Once it was clipped up, Emma patted the now clean seat and, after a moment’s hesitation, Regina lifted her leg over the frame and settled into the surprisingly comfy saddle, fingers clasping rubber handles tightly.

“Good,” Emma said. “Now, brakes are here and here,” she said, uncurling Regina’s fingers and wrapping them around the brakes as well as the handle. “Pull both together because if you only pull the front one, you could go over the bars.”

“What?” Regina asked, alarmed.

“Don’t worry,” Emma reassured. “You won’t be going fast enough today for that to happen. Now,” she said, moving to stand so each of her thighs was on either side of the front wheel, holding the bike steady, “put your feet on the pedals.”

“You’re definitely holding it up?” Regina asked, sceptically.

“Sure am,” Emma said, leaning over the bars and kissing Regina quickly.

Regina nodded and, after taking a deep breath, quickly placed her feet on the pedals. The bike wobbled minutely but stayed upright.

“Good,” Emma grinned. “That’s the balance you need to get but it’s much easier when you’re moving.

Regina looked like she didn’t believe the statement but didn’t say anything. Instead, she returned her feet to solid ground and released her hold of the handlebars.

“Ready to try?”

“Do I have to?” Regina asked, her voice suddenly quiet.

“No,” Emma said at once. “I’m not going to force you to do anything, Regina. But riding a bike is a great skill to have and to be honest I can’t believe you don’t already know how to do it. I mean, you’re such an accomplished, intelligent woman -”

“Whose parents had busy lives,” Regina finished. “I know, I know. I need to learn how to do this. But it’s kind of scary, to be honest.”

“Good job you’ve got Henry to learn with then, isn’t it?” Emma said, pointing to her son who was about one hundred metres in front of them.

“But he’s six. He’s allowed to learn. It’s embarrassing at my age.”

“You’re hardly old, Regina,” Emma pointed out. “And I think it’s admirable that you’re choosing to learn now.”

“I’m not choosing,” Regina shot back. “You’re making me do this.”
Emma sighed. “No, I’m not, honey. If you don’t want to do it, you don’t have to.”

“I do,” Regina said, her tone changing so fast it was giving Emma whiplash. “It’s just scary.”

“Then less talking and more action,” Emma said, releasing the bike that was still clasped between her thighs. “Hands up here, fingers over brakes. Now you’re going to put your right foot on the pedal just past the highest point, push off with your left foot and you’ll be on your way. Try to keep the handlebars as steady as possible, ok?”

Regina nodded and took a deep breath. Emma placed another kiss to her cheek before standing back. A final nod of determination and Regina raised her foot and placed it exactly where Emma had instructed her. Once more, she glanced at the blonde who smiled encouragingly. Eyes returned to the path before her. Tarmac had never looked more intimidating. She pushed off.

The whole frame wobbled beneath her and she squealed as she quickly planted her feet back on the floor.

“That was great,” Emma enthused, walking the few metres Regina had just travelled. “This time, try to put your left leg on the pedal and join in the movement. It helps with the balancing.

Regina’s heart was in her mouth but she nodded her understanding and prepared herself once more, wiping her sweaty palms quickly before trying again. This time, the bike was a little steadier and her left foot almost made it onto the pedal before she swerved violently to the right and skidded to a stop on the grass.

“Getting better,” Emma said, this time jogging to Regina’s side. “Make sure you keep your handlebars straight and try not to look down.”

“It’s easier said than done,” Regina huffed.

“It is,” Emma agreed. “And you’re doing great.”

“You’re patronising me,” Regina said. “Please stop it.”

“I’m encouraging you,” Emma amended. “There’s a difference. Now, try again?”

This time Regina’s left foot landed squarely on the pedal. She was so surprised that she momentarily forgot what she was supposed to do as her mouth fell open in surprise. The bike slowed and began to wobble until she managed to resume her pedalling and straightened the bars just in time to avoid the family walking towards them. Emma grinned and ran after her girlfriend, beaming with pride at the back of Regina who was still moving and still upright. Another ten metres down the road, a rock skittered away from Regina’s front tyre, the wheel slipped and the brakes squeaked.

“You ok?” Emma asked, rushing up to Regina’s side just as the brunette stopped.

“I did it!” came a gleeful shout.

“You sure did,” Emma grinned. “That was awesome. You picked it up so quickly.”

“Except I did just get scared of a pebble,” Regina said, glancing back and glowering at the offending obstacle.

“Pebbles are difficult to negotiate until you have your steering up to code,” Emma said. “Want to cycle to Henry now? I think they’re waiting for us.”
Down the path the little group could be seen, sitting on a bench with Henry’s new bike parked beside them. Regina nodded in determination, her mind set on her new goal. Without hesitation, she kicked off again and began to pedal, Emma jogging beside her. As they approach, Henry spotted the two of them and climbed onto the bench, clapping and cheering.

“Gina! You did it!” he yelled. “Now you can ride like me.”

“Yeah, it looks like I can,” Regina grinned, dismounting and propping the bike against the edge of the bench, beside Henry’s.

“Good work, Regina,” Ruby said, holding her hand out for a high five which Regina performed. “Now, sandwiches?”

“Yes please,” Emma said, sitting down beside her best friend and beginning to unpack the bag she had been carrying and handing out their lunch.

Not long after they had all finished eating, Henry stifled a yawn.

“Right, time to head back I think,” Emma said.

Henry protested but when Regina suggested they watch a film back at the apartment with popcorn, he came around to the idea. He rode his bicycle back to the park entrance, Regina riding ahead of him, wobbling occasionally. Once they reached the road, Billy hoisted the small boy onto his shoulders and carried him the rest of the way. Regina deemed the pavement too narrow for her bad steering and the road too scary so Ruby rode the bicycle instead. By the time they got back to the flat, Henry was fast asleep.

“Was it too much for him today?” Emma whispered as she lay him down in his bed, Regina hovering behind her.

“He’ll be fine,” the doctor assured her. “He’s just done a lot. An afternoon nap and he’ll be up again in a couple of hours.”

The two women left the room and returned to the deserted living room. Emma flopped onto the couch and Regina did the same.

“So, two hours, huh?” Emma said, a sideways look at the brunette. “Any ideas on how we could fill the time?”

Regina grinned at the lowered tone of her girlfriend’s voice. In a fluid movement, she swung her leg over the blonde and straddled her waist, lips instantly finding Emma’s. Their tongues met quickly, tasting one another again even though they had spent over an hour making love the previous night. It was never enough, apparently. Just as Emma’s hands were trailing up Regina’s back, beneath her shirt, the door burst open.

“Emma, I’ve got Henry’s – Shit! Sorry!” Ruby exclaimed as she took in the scene before her and Regina quickly scrambling off Emma’s lap.

“Maybe knock next time,” Emma grumbled at her best friend, cheeks hot.

“We literally saw you guys two minutes ago,” Ruby reasoned. “It’s not my fault you two are horny little fuckers.”

“Shhh,” Emma said, glancing at Henry’s room.
“Oh, shut it, Ems,” Ruby laughed. “If I hadn’t come in, you two would have been doing something that would have been far more scarring to Henry than the f-word if he had woken up.”

Emma had to concede, she had a point. “What did you want?” she asked instead of arguing.

“Nothing,” Ruby said. “I came to return this.” She held up Henry’s helmet which she had ended up carrying home.

Emma pointed to the bike which Henry had insisted they store in the apartment rather than the bike shed which had crippled Emma’s in just a couple of months. Ruby hung it on the handlebars and turned back to the couple. Regina was still avoiding Ruby’s eyes.

“Right, I’ll leave you to it,” Ruby said, winking at Emma.

The door snapped shut and there was a long silence. “So,” Emma said at last. “Still in the mood?”

Regina looked once more at her girlfriend. She thought the moment had gone but when she saw Emma, lips stained by her own lipstick, hair mussed and cheeks flushed, the fire returned.

They landed on Emma’s bed in a tangle of limbs and clothes, eager to feel one another again. In no time at all, they were naked, arms wrapped around one another’s bodies. Emma rolled them over and pinned Regina down with her hips, mouth working furiously against the delicate skin of Regina’s neck.

“No marks,” the brunette reminded her breathlessly. There had been hell to pay from Zelena when she had appeared at work with the faintest outline of a lovebite visible beneath the makeup she had so carefully applied.

Emma moved southwards obediently, too eager to taste Regina to argue. She wasted no time in swiping her tongue through wet folds, drinking in the essence gathered there before she focused on Regina’s clit. Her fingers pushed inside the brunette, thrusting steadily as her tongue lapped. It was fast and dirty and exactly what they both needed. Regina came with her thighs clamped around Emma’s head, breath caught in her throat.

As soon as she was released, Emma kissed her way back up Regina’s body, laving each nipple as she passed and then finding the delectable lips where they shared the lingering taste of Regina’s orgasm.

“Your turn,” Regina said, her hand slipping between their bodies and toying with Emma’s clit. “And I have to thank you for teaching me to ride a bike too. An extra orgasm is fair payment, I think?”

“I’m not going to say no,” Emma said, hissing slightly as Regina’s fingers dipped lower. “But maybe we can save one of those for later. I want to make sure we’re dressed when Henry wakes up. Plus, consider the bike-riding lesson part of the grovelling schedule.”

Regina laughed. “You’re still going on that?”

Emma nodded. Over the past few weeks she had made an extra effort with Regina whenever she could, determined to apologise for what she had done. Flowers had been delivered both to Regina’s work (anonymously, of course) and home, as well as Emma making her several lunches which Zelena had delivered to the staff room at the hospital. She still hadn’t said those words though. She wasn’t sure whether they would be seen as an apology rather than what they really were. True. She hoped that now Henry was out of the hospital and they were going to be able to spend more time together, their relationship would well and truly get back on track.
“I’m going to keep going until you forgive me,” Emma said, kissing Regina softly.

The brunette, whose fingers were now sliding through Emma’s folds, sighed and smiled up at her girlfriend. “I’ve forgiven you, Emma. It’s done. It’s forgotten. I know you’re sorry and I know you regret what you said. Let’s move on, ok?”

“Really?”

“As long as it never happens again.”

“Of course not,” Emma said at once. “Never. I’ll never do that again, Regina. I … I love you.”
There was a long pause. Emma held her breath which made her feel extremely light headed as Regina’s fingers were pressed tenderly against her clit, frozen in place. Brown eyes scanned her face, trying to decide if the words were genuine. They were. Emma had known how she felt about Regina for weeks. Longer. Perhaps she’d always known what the doctor would mean to her, from the moment they first met in the hospital. Maybe everything that had happened, the hellish past two months, maybe it had all been leading up to this.

“I love you too.”

Lips crashed down against the startled blonde’s mouth. But it didn’t take long before Emma was kissing Regina back, her arms wrapping around the older woman and pulling their bodies flush together. She didn’t care that Regina’s hand was now trapped between them, the pressure released from her still aching clit as her fingers slipped away. She just needed to feel her. All of her. All of them. Together.

The knock on the door woke Emma at once; used to being a light sleeper after six years of motherhood. She glanced over at Regina who was curled against her back, and saw that she was decent. The two of them had gotten dressed into pyjamas in the early hours of the morning just in case Henry got up before them. Which, evidently, he had.

“Come in, kid,” Emma called, inadvertently rousing Regina who snuggled closer into her back, not quite aware of what was going on in her sleepy state.

The door creaked open and Henry’s head appeared, hair tousled from sleep. “Can I come in?”

“Of course you can, baby,” Emma said. “And thank you for knocking. That was very polite.”

Henry smiled despite the use of the nickname he despised and walked over to the bed. He hesitated as he stood beside the mattress for a moment before Emma pulled back the duvet and he scrambled up and slid beneath the warm covers. Behind Emma, Regina was finally realising what was happening and propped herself up on an elbow to peer over her girlfriend at the boy now in the bed with them.

“Good morning, Henry,” Regina said, her voice even lower and raspier than usual. Emma’s body felt a little hotter.

“Hi Gina,” Henry said, smiling at her as he lay down beside his mother. “You and Mum had another sleepover?”

“We did,” Regina said, glancing at Emma. “Is that ok with you?”

“Sure,” Henry said. “I like it when you cook me breakfast.”
“Hey!” Emma cried indignantly. “What about my breakfasts?”

“They’re not as good,” Henry said simply. “Gina’s pancakes are fluffier.”

Regina laughed as Emma scowled and flopped back into her pillows. “I do make fluffy pancakes,” Regina admitted, kissing Emma’s cheek as she lay down as well. “Would you like pancakes this morning, Henry?”

“Yes please,” Henry said. “With blueberries?”

“Do we have blueberries?” Regina asked, the question directed to Emma.

“Nope but I’m sure we can get some. Can we have another ten minutes in bed though? I’m tired.”

“Did you sleep bad?” Henry asked, a concerned look on his face.

“I slept well but only a little bit,” Emma admitted, deliberately not looking at Regina to stop herself thinking about what activities had kept the two of them up until the early hours of the morning. She suspected that had Henry not woken before them, the two of them would have found themselves entangled once more.

“That was silly,” Henry said. “You should have gone to bed earlier like me.”

“Yes,” Regina agreed, nodding fervently. “I think tonight we should go to bed straight after Henry. What do you say, Emma?”

The heat now rising up Emma’s body could not be ignored so she threw back the duvet, climbed over Henry and out of bed. “On second thoughts, I’ll run to the shop now and get those blueberries. Any other requests?”

“Chocolate,” Henry said. “And sweets.”

Emma laughed. She was glad her son had his appetite back but she didn’t want him to spend the next few months in the dentist having his teeth pulled out. He’d seen enough medical professionals to last him a lifetime. “We have everything you were given at the hospital in the cupboard, remember?” Emma said. The gifts from well-wishers had remained at the foot of Henry’s hospital bed, untouched, until Emma had loaded them into the back of the car the day before when Henry had been discharged.

“Oh yeah,” he nodded. “Then just the blueberries. And some chocolate milk.”

Emma laughed and grabbed some clothes before heading towards the bathroom to get changed. It wasn’t like both Henry and Regina hadn’t seen her getting dressed before but somehow the fact that they were both in the room together made it awkward. As soon as the blonde was gone, Henry reached for the discarded duvet and covered his chilled body in it. The fever was, at last, fading away.

“So,” Regina said, suddenly feeling a little self-conscious. She and Henry hadn’t spent a huge amount of time together, just the two of them. And they’d certainly never taken part in a Sunday morning ritual such as lying in Emma’s bed together without the woman herself. “Um, what do you want to do today?”

“After pancakes?”

“Naturally.”
“I don’t know,” Henry admitted. “It’s odd having to decide what to do. I mean, hospital was super boring and I hated lying in the bed all day. But at least I didn’t have to choose what I wanted to do. I just lay there. All the time.”

Regina laughed. “That is very true. Having options is hard but it is also a luxury. What did you miss most when you were in hospital?”

“My friends,” Henry said. “And school. But you said I couldn’t go back yet.”

“No,” Regina conceded. “Not yet. But soon. Just a few more weeks and then everything will go back to normal.”

“But you’ll still be here, right? And I’ll still see Dad?”

“What do you mean?” Regina frowned, slightly confused.

“Well, before I got sick, it was just me and Mum. All the time. There was Lily but -.” He stopped and glanced at Regina, suddenly fearful.

“I know about Lily,” Regina said softly. “Go on.”

“Oh, well, it was always me and Mum together. We saw Auntie Ruby and Billy too and Gran and Granddad sometimes. But it was just the two of us. That was normal. But then I got sick and Mum met you and then you two found Dad and now I don’t know what normal is.”

Regina sucked in a breath. Did this mean Henry wasn’t happy with the idea of her and Emma dating? Did this mean Henry thought their relationship was time-sensitive; tied only to his illness. And what about Neal? Surely it wasn’t her place to talk to Henry about his newfound father.

“I’ll be back in fifteen minutes,” came Emma’s voice from outside the bedroom before the apartment door slammed shut.

Oh. It seemed that, whether it was her place or not, Henry was only going to be getting answers from Regina. His small face was turned expectantly towards her, waiting.

“Um, I think your dad is going to be a part of your life from now on, Henry,” she began, knowing at least that he had been told that much when it came to Neal. “Remember how he’s coming down next weekend with your other granddad? He definitely wants to be a part of your life but because he lives in a different city, a different country, technically, you won’t see him all the time. Just sometimes. He’ll arrange special trips up to London to see you and maybe one day you can go to see him in Cardiff.”

“Yeah, Mum said,” Henry said. “So, he’ll always be my dad now?”

“I hope so,” Regina nodded. “If that’s what you want.” As she said this, she sent a silent prayer that Neal wouldn’t let this sweet little boy down.

“And you and Mum,” Henry said, bringing Regina back to the present. “Now I’m better, will you still come here to see me?”

“Yes,” Regina said. “Of course. Your mum and I met because of you getting sick Henry but we really like each other. Now you’re better, that just means the three of us can go out and do lots of fun things together instead of spending all of our time in the hospital. Does that sound like a nice idea?”
“Do you love her?”

Regina blinked. Had Henry really just asked her that.

“Um, yes, I do,” Regina said, thinking back to the moment the night before when she had first said those words out loud after Emma had declared her feelings for her. To be honest, she was amazed the blonde had managed to wait for as long as she had before she voiced the emotions both women had been fully aware of for weeks.

“Does my mum love you too?”

“She does,” Regina nodded. “And she loves you.”

“I know that,” Henry said simply. “I just wanted to check. She was really sad after Lily left. She thinks I don’t remember because I was only four but I do. She was sad for weeks. She just cried all the time and wouldn’t play with me. I spent lots of time with Auntie Ruby which was fun but then I came home and Mum was sad and it made me sad. I don’t want her to be sad like that again.”

Regina felt the tears burning her eyes and blinked rapidly to stop them from falling. Henry really was the most remarkable child she had ever met. Not surprising, she mused, considering who had raised him.

“Henry,” Regina said, reaching over and placing her hand on his chubby cheek. “I promise you that I will do my very best to not hurt your mum. I love her very much and I know she loves me too. We want to be together and hope we will be together for a very long time.”

“Like a family? With me?”

Unbidden, a tear rolled down Regina’s cheek and sank into the pillow. Henry frowned. Tears were sad, weren’t they? But before he could say anything, Regina spoke.

“Yes, Henry. Just like a family.”

When the couple lay in bed later that night, after spending the day with Henry, Regina recounted the conversation in full. Emma’s eyes glittered in the dark as she listened. She had never known, never even considered how her reaction to Lily’s departure had affected Henry. She thought she had been a good mum. She thought she had hidden her broken heart from her son. Apparently not. And it shattered all over again as Emma heard how much Henry wanted to protect her. How he was afraid that Regina might be the cause of such sorrow in Emma some time in the future and yet –

“I’d never leave you, Emma,” Regina whispered into the darkness. “I know I can’t predict what’s going to happen and that is one hell of a commitment to make after barely two months. But I can promise you I will never walk out on you and Henry, not like she did. I … well, right now I can’t imagine ever not wanting to be with you. I love you.”

“I love you too,” Emma said, their lips meeting in a tearful kiss. “And I know you can’t promise me forever. At least, not yet. But I trust you. I trust you not to disappear on us. If I had thought for a moment you were the kind of person who might do that, I would never have started anything between us. I trusted you from the start to not hurt me or Henry the way Lily did.”

“I won’t,” Regina said. “I promise. I don’t ever want to hurt you in any way.”

“But relationships have their ups and downs and I don’t expect this to be smooth sailing,” Emma
offered. “I mean; look at what we’ve been through already.”

Regina couldn’t help but laugh. It might have been a short relationship but they certainly had dealt with their fair share of drama. And emerged from the other side; stronger and still together.

“We just need to be honest with one another,” Regina said. “Every step of the way. Whatever we’re feeling, any concerns, anything at all. We voice them. We deal with them. And we can move on as a couple. Deal?”

“Deal,” Emma said, kissing Regina again. “Except we’re not a couple.”

Regina frowned. “We’re not?”

“Nope,” Emma replied. “I think it’s safe to say there are three of us in this relationship and from here on out, everything we decide needs to keep Henry in mind. He’s the most important person here, agreed?”

“Agreed,” Regina said. “The three of us.”

The word ‘family’ went unspoken but both women understood the implications of that conversation. From then on, there was no other way to describe the trio. They were family.
A/N: cute Henry and Neal scenes followed by some special alone time for our lovely ladies. And by that I mean sex. Because why not? This chapter is NSFW.

“… and then we’re going to go to the park so I can practice riding my bike and then Mum says we can get pizza for dinner and then I want to watch my new DVD, ok?”

“Sure,” Neal laughed, edging his way into Emma’s apartment with Henry clinging to his leg like a limpet. “Sounds like a great weekend, son.”

Henry beamed up at his father, Emma watching on from the couch with a smile on her face too. It was still strange to have Neal in Henry’s life but she couldn’t deny that her son seemed incredibly happy. Their son, she corrected herself.

“Where’s your dad?” Henry asked. “Mum said he was coming to meet me today too.”

“He’s getting the train down tomorrow,” Neal said.

“He doesn’t live with you?”

“Nope, he lives up in Scotland. He moved up there from Bristol after my mum died.”

“Oh,” Henry said. There was an awkward pause while the young boy tried to decide what the appropriate reaction was to finding out his grandmother was dead, and then; “did you bring me some new top trumps?”

Emma rolled her eyes at her son’s tactlessness. But then again, he was only six so what did she expect? Neal had indeed brought some more top trump cards and the boy squealed with excitement when they were produced from Neal’s bag. Within ten minutes the three of them were engaged in a furious game.

“So, where’s Regina today?” Neal asked later that afternoon as the two of them walked along the park path, following Henry who was pedalling ahead of them.

“Shift at the hospital,” Emma said. “And then some family dinner she has to go to. An aunt’s in town from New York or something.”

“And you weren’t invited?”

“I haven’t met her family yet,” Emma shrugged. “Didn’t fancy meeting them all in one go.”

“She’s met yours,” Neal pointed out.

That was true, Emma mused. Regina had met both her parents but in the capacity of Henry’s doctor. It was different. Did she want to meet Regina’s family? Of course. But was she ready? Not quite. They might be in a committed, loving relationship but meeting parents was still a big step.
Families were a little intimidating for Emma. She presumed it was because she hadn’t had one for so long.

“You know her father is Herbert Mills, right?”

“Who?” Neal asked, jogging forward and steering Henry back onto the path from where he had veered off onto the grass.


Neal shrugged. “I don’t really follow politics. Tory or Labour?”

“Labour,” Emma said. “One of the good guys.”

Neal snorted and shook his head. “He’s a politician. There ain’t no such thing as a good politician.”

“Not true,” Emma said. “There are some great ones out there but most of them get stuck on the back benches and never get the chance to make a difference.”

“Whatever,” Neal said. “The whole country’s run by morons anyway. They’re never going to listen to the little guys like me or you.”

“Herbert Mills did,” Emma retorted. “But he’s retired now. I’ll admit that our current government leaves a lot to be desired but there have been some good people in the past.”

“Whatever,” Neal shrugged. “You wanna head to order pizza now? It’s getting dark and I’m hungry.”

“Ask Henry,” Emma said, glad the subject had moved on from politics before she became too impassioned. “It’s his weekend.”

Neal caught up with their son who was now pedalling with confidence down the middle of the path. Emma watched as Neal walked alongside the small boy, Henry’s face upturned towards him, the distraction making him steer sideways and over Neal’s foot. The pair stopped to untangle themselves and Emma appeared seconds later.

“Well?” she asked, ruffling Henry’s hair.

“Can we get a pizza with BBQ sauce?” Henry asked, turning to his mother.

“Ask your dad,” Emma said. “It’s his weekend.”

“Are you trying to avoid making any decisions this weekend?” Neal chuckled.

“Can I, Dad?”

The word seemed magnified in the quiet park, the simple syllable hanging in the air for several seconds before fading, Henry still looking expectantly at his father. His Dad.

“Yeah,” Neal said after a long pause. “You can have anything you want, buddy. What about some chicken strips to go with the pizza? And maybe a bottle of coke?”

“Ok, it’s not entirely your weekend,” Emma jumped in. “Trust me, you don’t want to feed the kid that much junk food. You can get the chicken strips or the coke and you have to order a side salad too.”

“Because otherwise you’ll get scurvy.”

“What’s scurvy?” Henry asked.

“Ask Regina tomorrow,” Emma said. “Come on. Let’s go to that independent pizza place on the corner rather than a chain. Henry, do you want to show your dad where it is?”

Neal glanced at Emma when she said that word again but his attention was quickly returned to Henry who set off down the path, a call of “come on, Dad!” heard over his shoulder.

The train station was busy; unsurprising for a weekend. Neal weaved through the crowds, Henry’s hand clasped tightly in his. Emma had insisted the two go alone to meet Henry’s paternal grandfather. It was the first time Neal had been on his own with Henry outside of the hospital or Emma’s apartment. It felt … nice.

“What’s he like?” Henry asked once the two of them had located the right gate through with Neal’s father would arrive.

“He’s a businessman,” Neal said. “He’s very sensible and he always wears a suit.”

“He sounds boring,” Henry remarked. “Does he watch football?”

Neal chuckled. “He does,” the man nodded. “Still supports Bristol City, as far as I know.”

“Why? They’re rubbish!”

“Loyalty,” Neal shrugged. His father had lived most of his adult life in Bristol and even though he had left only a few months after his wife died, the city still held a special place in his heart.

“What should I call him?” Henry asked after a few moments.

“Well, his name is Robert but you can call him Grandad if you want?”

“I already have a Grandad,” Henry pointed out.


“Maybe. What does he look like?” he asked turning back to the platform where the train from Edinburgh had finally arrived and passengers had begun to spill onto the station, eager to get out of the carriage they had been riding in for hours.

“He’s quite short and he has long-ish hair and -”

“Long hair?” Henry interrupted. “Like a girl?”

“No, like a medieval king,” Neal said, parroting what his father had always said in defence of his hair style. Neal had never been much of a fan to be honest.

“Can you lift me up so I can look for him?”

Neal nodded and hoisted Henry onto his shoulders. The boy felt almost weightless and Neal wasn’t sure whether it was because his bouncer gig meant he spent hours in the gym or because his son had lost so much weight when he had been sick. He sincerely hoped it was the former.
Despite Henry’s eyes keenly scanning the crowd, it was Neal who spotted the older man first. He grinned and waved, pointing out his father to Henry whose face scrunched up as he tried to work out who Neal was indicating. As the man drew closer, Neal’s own face creased.

“Pa? What’s wrong?”

“Nice to see you too, son,” Robert Cassidy said as he came through the barrier.

“You’re walking with a stick,” Neal said, ignoring the greeting and temporarily forgetting Henry was sat on his shoulders. “You’re limping. What the fuck happened?”

“Dad!” Henry shouted. “That’s a bad word!”

Brought back to where he was, Neal reached up and gently lowered Henry back to the floor.

“You’re right, sorry bud,” Neal said. “Let’s not tell your mum what I said, ok?”

“And you must be Henry,” Robert said, quickly seizing the excuse to stop answering his son’s questions.

“Hi,” Henry said, suddenly shy. He reached up and gripped his dad’s hand, moving closer to his leg.

“Nice to meet you, Henry,” Robert said. “I’m your Grandad but you can call me Bobby if you like?”

“Dad said I didn’t have to call you Grandad because I already have one of them,” Henry said.

“Bobby will be just fine,” the man said, bending over and holding out his hand.

Henry took it and they shook, the boy puffing out his chest slightly at the grown up interaction he had been allowed to take part in. But then Neal interrupted his big boy moment with more questions.

“Again, let’s go back to the cane you’re leaning on. Pa, what happened?”

“I had a little accident,” Bobby said, nodding his head towards the exit.

“No, we’re getting the train to Clapham Junction,” Neal said, taking his father’s small holdall and leading the trio in the correct direction and walking extra slowly so his father could keep up. “And what kind of accident?”

“Dad, I’m tired,” Henry piped up. “Can I sit on your shoulders again?”

Neal wasn’t sure whether his son was really tired or just wanted to sit up high. Emma had warned him it might be a bit much but they had decided the short train journey and the father-son time would be good. Regina, as Henry’s unofficial doctor, had confirmed it was ok. So Henry was lifted skywards once more before Neal turned expectantly to Bobby.

“I fell down the stairs a few months ago and broke my ankle,” Bobby admitted. “It’s fine but when I walk on it for too long, it gets a little sore. Hence the cane.”

“I knew you shouldn’t have gone up there to live alone,” Neal glowered. “Why don’t you move back down so I can take care of you.”

Bobby scoffed. “Son, you’re not really the care-giving type. Except with this one, it seems. I hear you’ve been a little bit sick, Master Henry?” Bobby said, turning to his new-found grandson.
“Yeah I was in hospital for years,” Henry declared, nodding his head seriously. “I had some bad blood until Dad gave me some of his good blood and now I’m better. Doctor Lena and Doctor Gina helped me get well again.”

“They sound like great doctors,” Bobby said.

“They’re the best,” Henry declared. “But Gina is the bestest because she loves my mum.”

Bobby raised his eyebrows and looked at Neal.

“Did I not mention that?” Neal asked as he handed over a spare Oyster card for his father. “Emma’s gay. She and Henry’s doctor are together.”

“Is that ethical?” Bobby asked as the passed through the barriers.

Neal shrugged, causing Henry to jiggle up and down, making the small boy laugh. Neal wobbled his shoulders all the way to the train where he had to put Henry down to get through the doorway. The three of them found seats and Henry immediately pressed his face up against the window, watching the crowds on the platform move past. Bobby regarded him for a while, smiling.

“Thanks for inviting me down,” he said, turning back to Neal.

(Of course,” Neal said. “I know how important family is for you and I know you thought you were never going to get grandchildren.”

“With your track record,” Bobby chuckled. “Can you blame me?”

“Hey,” Neal said, feigning hurt. “I’m popular with the ladies.”

“For a night,” Bobby replied. “You’re not exactly marriage material are you?”

“I’m twenty-six!” Neal exclaimed. “I don’t wanna get married!”

“I thought you said you liked…” Bobby jerked his head towards Henry.

Neal shook his head. “She’s gay, remember?”

“Can’t have been that gay seven years ago,” Bobby pointed out.

“Leave it,” Neal advised. “I’ve already gotten into trouble for trying to go there. Besides, she’s happy with Regina.”

“Gina?” Henry asked, turning around at the familiar name. “Is she coming over tonight?”

“I think she’ll be there when we get back,” Neal nodded. “She was going to make her lasagne in honour of my dad coming, remember?”

“Yay!” Henry said, bouncing on his seat and raising little puffs of dust around his knees. Just then, the train began to move and Neal insisted Henry sit down, just in case. Bobby rolled his eyes as he watched his son fuss over the small boy. He had to admit, he had never expected Neal to become a father, at least not an involved one, and was pleasantly surprised to see how well he interacted with Henry.

“How long do we have?” Regina asked, breathlessly as Emma’s lips travelled down her sternum.
“Long enough,” came the mumbled reply.

Regina chuckled and then gasped as Emma pulled down her bra cup and latched onto her nipple. She had barely made it two steps into the apartment when Emma had jumped her, pinning the brunette against the door and kissing her hard. The two of them hadn’t spent much time alone together recently and it was clear the blonde was craving something. The bags of food which Regina had bought for their dinner, had been dropped on the floor and the couple moved hastily to the bedroom.

“Fuck, I’m missed you,” Emma said as she lay Regina down on the bed, now completely naked, a trail of clothes clear evidence of their eventful journey from the living room.

“I missed you too,” Regina said. “Now how about you show me how much.”

Emma grinned and crawled her way up the flawless woman, kissing her soundly before scrambling back down. She pushed Regina’s legs wider, opening up the woman’s sex before her mouth descended. Regina cried out and grasped the bed sheets. Emma’s core twinged at the noise. They always had to be quiet when Henry was home and she had forgotten how much she liked it when Regina vocalised her pleasure.

She began to lap eagerly at the swollen, wet flesh, knowing that they didn’t have much time before Neal, Henry and Henry’s new grandfather would be back. Regina’s thighs opened wider, offering herself up to Emma who gratefully moved her tongue down to probe Regina’s entrance. She pushed inside, savouring the rich, tangy flavour before returning to the brunette’s neglected clit. Two fingers slid smoothly into Regina, drawing a wanton moan. Emma’s body shivered at the sound but she stayed focused and began a steady rhythm. Regina’s hips soon joined in, drawing her fingers deeper each time. Emma’s lips were sealed over her clit, her tongue circling the sensitised bundle and driving Regina steadily to her peak.

She came with Emma’s name on her lips, thighs clamped around the blonde head which lapped without pausing as waves of pleasure crashed over the trembling body. When Emma pulled away, grinning and licking the come from her lips, Regina sat up and drew their mouths together, desperate to reconnect with the woman and taste herself on the blonde’s tongue.

“Your turn,” Regina said after a few minutes, flipping their entwined bodies easily.

She had just removed Emma’s lace underwear which, remarkably, were still in place, when they heard the front door.

“Hi, we’re home!”

Emma froze, eyes wide as she looked at Regina whose face had paled, despite her recent powerful orgasm.

“Mum? Gina?” came Henry’s voice. “Why is this food here? And why are there clothes all over the floor?”
“Shit!” Regina gasped, sitting up abruptly and forcing Emma to topple off her body.

“They’re back already?” Emma said, her own heart racing both from arousal and fear that the bedroom door would be opened by a small boy and she and Regina would be caught completely naked and in a very compromising position.

“Mum?”

“Hang on, Henry,” Emma called back, scrambling out of bed and rushing to the door which she quickly locked. “We’ll be one minute.”

She then darted to her cupboard and pulled out jeans and a t-shirt along with some fresh underwear. Regina on the other hand, wrapped herself in the duvet and curled up against the headboard. When Emma, hopping on one foot as she put on a sock, spotted this, she frowned.

“ Aren’t you getting dressed?” she asked.

“My clothes are all outside,” Regina said. “Someone was too eager to get me naked, remember?”

Despite the embarrassment she was inevitably going to have to deal with, Emma grinned. Yes, she most definitely remembered her haste to get Regina out of her clothes. Although, in hindsight, perhaps it was a mistake to have done so before getting to her bedroom.

“Here,” Emma said, reaching for a second pair of jeans and a baggy sweater which were thrown in Regina’s direction, along with some clean underwear.

Regina raised an eyebrow but acquiesced when she realised she wouldn’t be able to hide in Emma’s bedroom all afternoon.

“Mum!” came Henry’s shout again.

Emma finished getting dressed and turned to Regina just as the brunette was pulling the sweater over her bare chest. Damn it, Emma thought to herself. Why did they have to come back early before she had a chance to ravage the raven haired beauty.

“Stop looking at me like that,” Regina said, spotting the look on her girlfriend’s face. “You’re making it too obvious.”

Emma couldn’t help but laugh. “You really think they don’t know what we’ve been doing in here. Regina, our clothes are all over the floor out there.”

“And whose fault is that?” Regina asked.

True, Emma conceded. She may have been the one to initiate their heated love-making but she
didn’t regret it, irrespective of how awkward the next few minutes were going to be.

“Ready?” she asked, as Regina ran her fingers through her tangled hair.

“As I’ll ever be,” Regina shrugged. “You’re doing the explaining, ok?”

Emma nodded her agreement to that. Taking a deep breath, she unlocked and opened her bedroom door, stepping out into the living room with Regina right behind her. Stood by the couch was an amused looking Neal, an older man who was obviously Neal’s father and Henry, who was eating a packet of crisps he had picked up from the discarded shopping.

“Henry, you’ll spoil your dinner,” Emma scolded lightly, desperate for any conversation which didn’t revolve around what the trio had just interrupted.

“What are your clothes here, Mum?” Henry asked, fist digging back into the bag, ignoring the request. “Hi, Gina,” he added.

“Um, I was hot,” Emma offered lamely.

Neal let out a snort of laughter and even his father’s lips curled upwards in mirth. Regina rolled her eyes at the pathetic excuse.

“Gina left the shopping here too,” Henry pointed out, indicating bags of food which were scattered over the floor from where they had been dropped.

“Yes, she was … hot as well,” Emma said. “We should put that food in the fridge though, right? Do you want to do that for me?”

Henry groaned but walked over to the bags and began to gather up the food. Emma watched him for a moment, pink-cheeked, before turning back to the two men. “Hi, I’m Emma,” she said, extending her hand to the stranger.

“Robert Cassidy,” Neal’s father introduced, shaking Emma’s hand. “But I told Henry he could call me Bobby.”

“Nice to meet you,” Emma said. “This is my girlfriend, Regina. Sorry about earlier. We weren’t … expecting you back so early.”

“Evidently,” Neal said, still grinning. Emma scowled at him which only made him laugh.

“How was your journey?” Regina asked Bobby, hoping to move the conversation along.

“Really? You’re not even going to let me tease you about this?” Neal asked incredulously.

“Nope,” Emma said, crossing the room and picking up the remaining food, since Henry had only managed to gather the box of lasagne sheets and his juice cartons.

“Not fair, Emma,” Neal called after the blonde.

Regina couldn’t help but feel a little relieved at the gently ribbing the two of them had received. At least Neal wasn’t looking at Emma with his besotted puppy-dog eyes. It seemed he had at last accepted that the two of them were together and even found humour in their interrupted sexcapades.

“So, Neal tells me you were Henry’s doctor,” Bobby said, taking a seat on the sofa. His ankle was hurting him after the walk from the station, even though it hadn’t been that long. As soon as he sat
down and took the weight off, the discomfort eased.

“Um, sort of,” Regina nodded. “I saw him when he was first in A and E. I’m a paediatric doctor there. But then when he was admitted for observation and testing, he got transferred into the general hospital. My colleague was his primary physician from then on. Although, I will admit I was a regular visitor to his room, in an unofficial capacity.”

“And the hospital doesn’t mind that?” Bobby asked. “Doctors dating patients?”

“No, it’s ok,” Regina said. She knew this was something she and Emma would have to come up against often enough when people discovered how they met. “Technically Emma wasn’t my patient, Henry was, and there are no official rules to say you cannot form relationships with the mother or father of the child you are treating. However, I will accept that my attachment to both of them would have inhibited me to make impartial decisions about their treatment but luckily Doctor West was Henry’s doctor by the time that came into play.”

Bobby seemed to accept that answer since he shrugged and sat back on the sofa. Regina glanced at Neal, for the first time seeing the man as an ally, and he smiled reassuringly at her. She suddenly felt foolish for feeling jealous of the man. True, he had looked at Emma with burning eyes at time but Regina could hardly blame him. Emma was gorgeous after all. That thought reminded her of the fact that she hadn’t had a chance to pleasure her girlfriend before they were interrupted. Her core twitched.

“Um, Mr Cassidy, can I get you a drink? We have beer, wine, soft drinks,” Regina offered, distracting herself with the job of hosting.

“Beer please,” Bobby said. “And call me Bobby.”

Regina nodded and smiled. It seemed the older Cassidy had accepted her explanation and wasn’t going to give them a hard time about how the couple met. Of which Regina was glad because she suspected Henry’s new paternal family was going to become quite a prominent feature.

“Ditto,” Neal said. “Need a hand?”

“No thank you,” Regina said, eager to retreat to the kitchen where Henry and Emma were avoiding the questioning of the boy’s new-found grandfather.

She scurried away and soon found Emma and Henry unloading the shopping Regina had bought. Aside from the ingredients needed for her lasagne dish, there were a number of other food items which Emma had asked Regina to pick up. The domesticity of the task went unsaid.

“What did they say?” Emma asked as she closed the fridge and moved to help Henry put away the jars and tins in the cupboard.

“I was questioned about whether I was Henry’s doctor when our relationship began, effectively,” Regina shrugged, searching the fridge for two chilled beers.

“Oh that again?” Emma sighed.

“No, Neal actually defended us,” Regina placated. “It was Mr Cassidy, Bobby, who seemed like he might have a problem.”

“We did nothing wrong,” Emma said, crossing the room and looping her arms around Regina’s
“I know,” Regina said, her own hands now draped around Emma’s neck. “That’s what my mother told me last night.”

“You talked to your mother about us?”

“Of course,” Regina said. “She wants to meet you, by the way. Both of you.”

Emma swallowed. “Already?”

Regina looked up into Emma’s face. Without her heels on, Regina was at least two inches shorter than the blonde. She liked the height difference. “It’s been almost three months, Emma. We’re hardly rushing things. I’ve met your parents, remember?”

“I know,” Emma said. “But, what if they don’t like me?”

Regina scoffed and kissed the blonde before returning to her task of pouring the beers into glasses. “They’ll love you,” she said insistently.

“How do you know?”

“Because I love you,” Regina said simply. “And because you’re an amazing person. But how about we focus on one set of parents at a time and return to entertain Henry’s new grandfather and try and avoid even thinking about what they interrupted?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Emma grinned. “Come on Henry, let’s go and spend some time with your Grandad Bobby.”

It was strange, Emma decided as she looked around the table later that evening. For so long, for so many years, it had just been her and Henry. Sure, there was that time she spent will Lily but she had erased those painful memories from her mind, as best she could. Now however, her son was sat in his usual seat but rather than simply regaling his mother with tales about his day, he was talking to his father, laughing at jokes his grandfather told and asking Regina politely if he could have a second helping of lasagne.

Emma had never felt like she wasn’t able to provide for Henry. He was always fed and clothed and loved. God, he was loved. Her heart ached with love for the boy now grinning at her, a splodge of bolognise on his cheek. She smiled back as she leaned forward and wiped the trace of his dinner from his face. Yes, Henry Swan had always been a happy boy but his life had never been full of family. She supposed it was her own fault they didn’t spend as much time as they should with her own parents but their life in the city seemed to prevent them from visiting, especially now Henry had friends at school. That evening, however, Henry was surrounded by new family members, revelling in being the centre of attention.

Unsurprisingly, it didn’t take long after dinner for the excitement of the day to catch up with Henry and he promptly passed out halfway through Cars 2, a DVD gift from Bobby. Emma had suggested Neal put their son to bed, the first time he had done so since Henry left hospital. Once the boy was tucked neatly beneath his duvet, Neal and Bobby departed. The pair had booked into a hotel down the road, even though the pull-out bed was increasingly becoming Neal’s second home.

“See you tomorrow,” Emma said, as she waved them off down the dark London street.

By the time she returned to the apartment, Regina was busy in the kitchen, cleaning up the mess of
plates, glasses and silverware. Despite Emma’s insistence that she not only needn’t bother because the brunette cooked but that also they could just leave it until the morning, the job was completed soon enough. Regina hated going to bed with a dirty kitchen and Emma wasn’t about to let her girlfriend wash up after she had cooked a delicious feast. It wasn’t even late by the time they had finished but both women were ready to head for bed.

“Bobby seems nice actually,” Emma said. “I wasn’t sure what to expect but he’s great with Henry.”

“Henry likes him too,” Regina said as she slid beneath the covers and snuggled up to Emma who had been waiting for her with her arm outstretched. “He was positively awestruck when Bobby told him he’d been in the RAF.”

“Oh I hope he doesn’t decide to enlist when he’s older,” Emma groaned, hand now curled around Regina’s shoulder. “I’d never sleep again with the worry.”

Regina chuckled and shifted so her leg was thrown over Emma’s waist. “I don’t think you need to be too concerned about potential career paths just yet,” she said. “He’s only six.”

“And a half,” Emma pointed out. “Where does the time go?”

“I have no idea,” Regina said. “I can’t believe I’ve known you guys for almost three months.”

That comment reminded Emma of something; a comment which had fluttered through her mind several times that evening. “Do your parents really want to meet me?”

Even in the darkness, Regina could recognise the expression of apprehension on the blonde’s features.

“Of course they do,” Regina soothed. “I’ve told them so much about you and Henry. They’re both dying to meet the woman who’s made me so happy and her adorable son.”

“They know about me? Like, details and stuff?”

“Well, I’ve not given them a blow by blow account of our sex life if that’s what you’re worried about but yes, they know I love you. They know about Henry’s illness and how I was there for you during some difficult times.”

“Do they know about Cardiff?”

“You mean, do they know you got pregnant from a one-night stand and then we went on a road trip to find Henry’s father?” Regina asked. Emma didn’t say anything but she nodded her head. “Not exactly, but they know Neal has only recently appeared in Henry’s life. I have to confess that I talked to Mother about my feeling of jealousy towards him.”

“You’re close to your mother then?”

“I’m an only child,” Regina said. “I was my parents’ whole world. Yes, I’m close to both of them and I’ve always had a particularly honest relationship with my mother. Their marriage is incredible and I feel comfortable asking my mother for dating advice. I trust her judgement and I hope I’ll have a marriage as wonderful as theirs one day.”

“You want to get married?” Emma asked without thinking.

There was a pause and then; “one day, yes.”
Emma said nothing but there was another question she was burning to ask. “So, if you’re close to your mother, does she know about … the fight?”

“Fight?”

Emma sighed. “You know. When I yelled at you.”

“Yes, she knows,” Regina said quietly. “I was so upset and I needed to talk to her. But she also knows we’ve made up since and she knows you’ve apologised.”

“Does she know about the grovelling schedule?”

Regina laughed and placed a kiss to Emma’s cheek. “No, darling. She doesn’t know that you spent weeks trying to give me mind-blowing orgasms to make up for your short fuse.”

“Good,” Emma said, releasing a whoosh of air in relief. “Because that would have made our first meeting awkward.”

“So you’ll meet them?”

“Of course,” Emma said. “I’ve always wanted to meet them it’s just a big step, you know. Plus, your dad is kind of famous.”

Regina rolled her eyes. “He’s a former politician, he’s not a rock star.”

“He’s a rock star politician,” Emma declared. “He’s amazing.”

“Tell him that and you won’t have any problems getting their approval,” Regina said.

“Do I need their approval?”

“I’ve always imagined my father walking me down the aisle one day to someone he’s happy I’m going to spend the rest of my life with,” Regina said, without thinking.

Emma coughed, spluttering into the suddenly quiet room. Regina’s fingers tensed on her stomach where they were resting but didn’t move away. There was a long silence.

“Goodnight,” Emma said eventually.

“Goodnight,” Regina replied.

They both lay there for a long time before sleep finally claimed them that night.
“Finished?” Henry asked as the needle was withdrawn from his arm.

“Yep, all done for this week,” Zelena nodded as she handed the blood sample to Belle. “Thank you for sitting so calmly for me.”

“It’s ok,” Henry shrugged. “I’m used to it.”

Emma and Zelena exchanged sad smiles. After the past few months, it was no wonder Henry was accustomed to being poked and prodded endlessly. The boy was already climbing off the bed after his weekly exam and walking over to admire the mural in this particular examination room. His fingers traced reverently over the edge of Aladdin’s flying carpet, his mind conjuring up the adventures he would have if only he too had such a cool mode of transport.

“Same time next week?” Emma asked Zelena who was now making some notes on Henry’s chart.

“Let’s make it a fortnight,” Zelena said. “He’s doing so well I really don’t think we need to continue these weekly tests. It’s been over three months since the transplant and he’s progressing exactly as we’d expect. Unless something changes, I’ll see you the second Friday in May.”

Emma let out a long breath. “Really? No more weekly appointments?”

“No more weekly appointments,” Zelena smiled. “The end is in sight, Emma. He’s going to be just fine.”

The blonde glanced over at Henry and, seeing he was still absorbed in the painting, confessed something she had not vocalised to anyone but Regina.

“I didn’t think he was going to make it.”

Zelena smiled sympathetically and patted Emma’s arm. “It was touch and go at times, I’ll admit. But he’s fighter. He’s been so brave through this whole ordeal and now he’s well on the way to being a healthy little boy. You should be very proud of him. How is he doing back at school?”

“He’s loving it,” Emma said. “He was upset about having to miss class this morning to come here. I’m sure the novelty will wear off sooner or later and he’s only been back for a week. But it’s great to see him playing with his friends again and his teachers have been really positive about his return. He’s got some catching up to do but I’m helping him each evening now we have a few workbooks to go through.”

“Good,” Zelena said. “Getting him back into his routine is important now. A couple more months and all of this will be behind you.”
“I can’t wait to not have to come back here ever again,” Emma said, glancing around at the room with a sour look on her face as if it was the room’s fault her son had gotten sick.

“I’ll miss you too,” Zelena joked.

“You’ll see me often enough, I’m sure,” Emma said.

It was true; the two of them had spent some time together away from the hospital at events Regina had organised. There had already been a dinner at the brunette’s house and a picnic in the park the weekend before. Henry had barely sat down the entire time and instead cycled rings around the group on his new bike.

“Mum, can we go see Gina now?” Henry piped up.

“She’s working, kid,” Emma said. “We’ll see her tonight.”

“Oh, you guys are going to that too?” Zelena asked.

Emma nodded, mouth set into a thin line. Zelena’s eyebrows rose at the expression and she quirked her lips questioningly.

“I’ve not met her parents yet,” Emma admitted. “A fancy anniversary party with her entire family wasn’t exactly what I had in mind and … I just want to make a good impression.”

“Why wouldn’t you?” Zelena asked.

Emma shrugged. “I dunno, I’m not great in fancy social situations. It’s not like I went to many dinner parties with famous politicians in Bristol.”

“Oh yeah, Regina mentioned that you’re a groupie of her dad,” Zelena laughed.

Emma scowled as she felt her cheeks redden. “He did some good stuff, that’s all,” she defended.

Zelena chuckled again. “You’ll be fine. And if you make a fool of yourself, come and find me and we’ll get drunk. I’ve not had a night out in ages and the booze the Mills’ buy for their parties is always amazing.”

“Yeah, cos getting pissed is the best idea if I don’t want to make a fool of myself,” Emma replied, deadpan. “But thanks for the offer.”

“Mum, can we go now?” Henry said, bored of the adult conversation and having no desire to hang around the hospital any longer if he wasn’t allowed to see Regina.

“Sure, come on. Say goodbye to Doctor Zelena.”

“Bye, Lena,” Henry said. “See you next week.”

Zelena turned to Emma, silently asking her if she should tell Henry they were going to be seeing a lot less of each other.

“I’ll tell him on the way to school,” Emma said.

“He’s going back to school for the afternoon?”

“He insisted,” Emma said. “Plus, it means I can go into the office. I’m still catching up on everything I missed the past few months. I need all the hours child-free I can get.”
“You’ve got a strange, school-loving kid there,” Zelena laughed. “Have a good rest of your day and I’ll see you tonight. Bye Henry.”

“Bye,” Henry said, already hovering in the doorway and itching to get out to the car and on the way to school. He wanted to show his friends the cool Batman plaster Zelena had put over the little spot on his arm where the needle had pricked his skin. Even though it didn’t hurt and he didn’t need a plaster for such a small thing. He had endured much worse, as all his classmates had been told. Henry was practically famous as the boy who had nearly died. The best part about his new-found persona was that all the girls thought he had something contagious and refused to come near him. Which was great, because girls were disgusting, according to Henry Swan.

Emma eyed her reflection with distain before reaching around with a huff and unzipping her dress. It pooled around her feet before she walked back to her wardrobe and began to sift through her other clothing options. She didn’t hear the door creak open and only realised Henry was in the room when she caught sight of him climbing onto her bed.

“Oh, hey kid. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” he said, settling back against the soft pillows and reaching for her phone. “You’re not,” he added, unnecessarily.

“No,” Emma conceded. “I’ll be dressed soon though and then we can go, ok?”

Henry didn’t reply. He’d already unlocked her phone and opened a game which was requiring all of his attention. Emma turned back to her clothes and pulled out the dress she had worn to the last book launch of the publishing house. It wasn’t as plain as she had wanted it to be and she was sure the delicate blue lace would garner a fair amount of attention surrounded by others adhering to the black tie dress code but she was out of options. If she didn’t leave soon, they would be late and that was surely a worse first impression than a slightly slinky dress.

By the time she had returned from doing her make up and coiling her hair up into a large bun on the top of her head, Henry was lounging around on her bed with a thoroughly wrinkled shirt. She made him climb off and tried to straighten his clothes as best she could, tucking his little shirt into the elasticated waistband of his suit trousers.

“Where’s the jacket?” Emma asked.

Henry shrugged, not even looking up from the phone which was still clasped in his fingers. She sighed and ventured into his room where she found the miniature black dinner jacket lying on the floor. Cursing softly, she picked it up and returned to her son.

“Put it on please,” Emma said when he whined at the offered piece of clothing. “We want to look nice for Regina’s fancy parents, ok?”

He grumbled even as he forced his arms into the sleeves and shrugged it onto his shoulders. Emma ignored him as she squeezed her feet into her black stilettos. Seconds later, they were out the apartment. Before they left the building, Emma knocked on Ruby’s door to remind her friend that she was due to pick Henry up from the event a couple of hours later. The small boy was not expected to suffer through the whole evening and Emma was quite looking forward to some time along with Regina. Henry was equally excited about his sleepover with Auntie Ruby.

The venue had valet parking. Emma didn’t think she’d ever been anywhere with valet parking. She
didn’t even know that was a thing outside of America. Slightly embarrassed, she handed over the keys to her bug and watched as the young man climbed into the car and slammed the door, chips of paint fluttering to the pavement as he did so. She winced.

“Mum, come on. I want to see Gina,” Henry said, tugging on her hand and drawing Emma back to the reason they were at one of the fanciest hotels in London. Regina’s parent’s wedding anniversary.

The carpeted steps seemed to go on forever but eventually they emerged into a cavernous marble entrance hall and were ushered through a vast set of double doors, through which music and chatter were filtering out. Emma had barely scanned the crowd before Regina appeared in front of her. She must have been looking out for them, Emma realised as she felt a rush of relief at the sight of a familiar face in a sea of strangers.

“Gina!” Henry shouted, waving at the woman who was swaying her way towards them.

It was only as Regina came closer that Emma took in what the woman was wearing. Her heart began to race, eyes drawn to the tantalising strip of thigh which flashed every time the woman stepped forward with her left leg. She swallowed thickly as the woman finally reached her.

“Good evening,” Regina said, her voice a little thick as if she too was affected by the sight of her girlfriend. “Hi Henry,” she added quickly.

“Gina, look at my plaster from Doctor Lena,” Henry said, trying to wrestle off his jacket in order to show the doctor.

“Henry, not here please,” Emma said, her hand landing on his shoulder. The boy scowled but put the jacket back on. “And good evening to you too. You look … wow.”

Regina smirked. “You look beautiful as well,” she said, fingers reaching out and tracing over the lace trim pressed flush against Emma’s chest. The blonde shivered at the touch.

“It’s not too much? I know you said black tie but I don’t have many nice dresses and this was the only one which was mostly black and didn’t make me look like I was heading out clubbing and I really just wanted to -”

Lips pressed firmly against her own silenced Emma and she squeaked as she felt Regina’s mouth work gently against her own. Henry made a noise of disgust and tried to squirm out from beneath Emma’s hand which was still resting on her shoulder.

“You’re gorgeous,” Regina said when they broke apart just a few seconds later. “Come on, are you ready to meet my parents?”

“Nope,” Emma said, tucking a loose hair behind her ear and reaching for Henry’s hand.


“Mum made me wear it,” Henry grumbled. “I wanted to wear my new jeans but she said I couldn’t.”

“You look very handsome,” Regina insisted. “My cousin’s children are here somewhere. I’ll introduce you later and you can play with them if you like.”

Henry nodded his approval at that plan. He did not want to spend the evening with his mum and Regina if they were going to make those sappy faces at each other and be disgusting with their
kissing all the time.

Regina interlaced her fingers with Emma’s as they weaved through the crowd. She spotted Zelena, chatting with some people and waved. The doctor grinned and gave her the thumbs up. Emma forced a smile before refocusing her attention on spotting Herbert Mills. She couldn’t believe she was about to meet someone she had admired for so many years.

“Reggie!”

At the call of what Emma assumed was a family nickname, Regina veered to the left, waving her hand. Emma stumbled slightly in her heels, kept upright only by Regina’s tightened grip on her hand.

“Are you ok?” Regina murmured as they approached a woman who could only be Regina’s mother.

“Not used to heels, that’s all,” Emma said, feeling her cheeks and chest redden with embarrassment even as she spoke.

“They’ll love you,” Regina repeated just before they stopped before the woman in a elegant black ball gown.

“Mother,” Regina said. “I’d like for you to meet my girlfriend, Emma Swan, and her son, Henry. Emma, Henry, this is my mother, Cora Mills.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Emma said, letting go of Henry’s hand to extend her own towards the older Mills.

Cora scoffed and moved straight past the limb and pulled Emma into a hug.

“It’s wonderful to meet you at last, Emma,” Cora said. “I’ve heard so much about you.” Emma blushed, thinking immediately of that fateful day in the hospital. “And you too, Master Henry. My daughter tells me you’ve been a bit sick but that you’re much better now.”

“I still have to go to the hospital all the time,” Henry said, not quite ready to lose his badge as the invalid. “Doctor Lena took more of my blood today and -”

“Ok, kid, enough hospital talk for this party,” Emma interrupted. “And it’s a beautiful party, Mrs Mills. Thank you for inviting us.”

“Of course,” Cora beamed. “Anyone as important to my daughter as you two are will always be welcome at the ridiculous parties my husband throws. And please, call me Cora.”

“Where is Daddy?” Regina asked, looking around.

“He’s gone to find out why the champagne isn’t as chilled as we requested,” Cora said. “He just wants this whole night to be perfect for us. It’s cute, really, even if he has been driving me barmy with his planning for months.”

“Forty years of marriage is something to be celebrated,” Emma said. “Congratulations by the way. What’s your secret?”

“Honest communication and a healthy sex life.”

“Mother!” Regina exclaimed just as Emma clapped her hands over Henry’s ears.
“Ouch!” the boy grumbled. “Why did you do that?”

“Sorry kid,” Emma said, removing her hands and studiously ignoring eye contact with Cora who seemed to be enjoying the discomfort of the two women.

“Just giving you guys some tips,” Cora said. “I’ll go and see where your father has got to. Wait here and I’ll be right back.”

Before Regina could say a word, the woman disappeared into the crowd. Emma looked up at last, red-faced. Regina bit her lip and then giggled.

“Sorry,” she said. “Perhaps I should have warned you about my mother’s openness when it comes to s-e-x.”

“A heads up would have been nice,” Emma said, heart still pounding a little.

Regina laughed and wound her arms around Emma’s waist. Henry rolled his eyes.

“She’s right, however,” Regina said.

“Well, I don’t think we have any problems in those areas just yet, do we?” Emma asked, kissing Regina’s lips lightly.

“No complaints from me,” Regina said. “Reckon we can keep it up for forty years?”

Emma swallowed thickly. They hadn’t spoken about the night Regina had mentioned wanting her father to walk her down the aisle to marry someone he approved of. The fact that the brunette had been referring to Emma for the offhand comment had been the elephant in the room ever since. So perhaps they did need to work on their honesty. It wasn’t that Emma didn’t want to spend the rest of her life with Regina. There was no one else she could imagine doing exactly that with. But they had only been together four months. Wasn’t it too soon?

“Regina, I -”

“There you are, Princess.”

Regina unwound her arms from around Emma and turned towards the man who was approaching them. Emma knew instantly who he was, despite him being out of the public eye for many years.

“Hi Daddy,” Regina said. They hugged, even though it had only been half an hour since she had last seen him. She suspected the amount of champagne, chilled or otherwise, he had consumed might have been something to do with it. “Daddy, I’d like you to my girlfriend, Emma Swan, and her son, Henry. Emma’s a big fan.”

Emma spluttered on the sip of her own champagne at that and shot daggers at the smirking brunette before turning back to the man who was grinning widely at her.

“It’s an honour to meet you, Mr Mills,” Emma said, hand extended once more.

Herbert, unlike his wife, did shake hands before turning to Henry and stooping down. “Hello, Master Henry. My daughter tells me you’ve been a very brave little boy recently and that you had to be in hospital. Is that right?”

“Yes,” Henry said, nodding importantly. “I was in the hospital for years.”

“A month,” Emma amended.
Henry ignored her. “My dad gave me his good blood and now I’m well.”

“And we’re onto the blood again,” Emma sighed. Perhaps she ought to start taking Henry to more black tie events and improve his social skills. “Henry, why don’t you go and find Regina’s cousins?”

“I’ll take him,” Regina said. “I’ll be right back.”

She reached out for Henry’s hand, which he readily took, and the two of them disappeared into the crowd, leaving Emma alone with Herbert Mills. Her cheeks flushed as she realised who she was standing before.

“Um, great party, Mr Mills,” she said. “And congratulations to you and Mrs Mills.”

“Please call me Herbie,” the man said, taking a generous gulp of his champagne.

“Herbie?”

“Not the stuffy political you were expecting?” the man chortled.

“I … I never thought you were stuffy,” Emma said. “I mean, you’re amazing. That reform bill you passed for the state school system was incredible. And those campaigns for junior doctors. The changes to their working conditions was life-changing and they suddenly felt so much more valued and appreciated. It made me want to train to become a doctor at one point but then, well, I had Henry and my life sort of went down a different path.”

“Yes, Reggie told us you’re in publishing. Who do you work for?”

“Jones Limited,” Emma said. “We’re a small, independent house. You probably haven’t heard of us.”

“No, but that doesn’t mean you’re not excellent. What sort of books do you publish?”


“Do you write yourself?” Herbert asked.

“No,” Emma said. “Some day, perhaps. But right now I just edit other people’s creations.”

“Fancy editing mine?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’ve sort of written my auto-biography,” Herbert said with a grin. “Cora’s been telling me to do it for years and since I’ve retired I finally got around to doing so. Would you be interested in taking a look?”

“Yes, of course,” Emma said. “I’d be honoured.”

“And don’t be afraid to be critical,” Herbert said. “Even if you are a fan.”

Emma blushed. “I can’t believe she told you that.”

Herbert laughed and clapped Emma on the shoulder. “I’m flattered, dear,” he assured her. “It’s nice to know someone even remembers what I did all those years ago. And the fact that you’re making my daughter so happy is just the icing on the cake.”
“She’s really happy?” Emma said, looking across the room to where Regina was awkwardly crouched in her dress, introducing Henry to three boys who looked to be a similar age.

“I’ve never seen her so happy,” Herbert said. “And it’s all because of you and that little man over there. She loves you both so much. But you already know that, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do,” Emma admitted. “And the feeling’s mutual. She’s an incredible woman. I don’t know how I’d have got through the past few months without her.”

“Reggie says you’re an fantastic mother,” Herbert says. “I’m sure she’ll be asking for tips when two of you expand your family.”

For the second time that evening, Emma had chosen to drink champagne at an unfortunate time and Herbert patted her on the back as she dribbled and coughed, the fizzy liquid making her eyes water as it bubbled at the back of her throat.

“Um,” she gasped. “We’ve not exactly discussed that yet,” Emma said.

“Well, Reggie’s always wanted kids,” he said, oblivious to the effect he was having on Emma. “She’s been talking about adopting for years. And I’m sure Henry would love a little brother or sister.”

“I need to use the bathroom,” Emma said abruptly. “Excuse me.”

Without waiting for Herbert to formally dismiss her, she turned and pushed her way through the crowd heading for the nearest door without caring where it led. She found herself in a service corridor, waiters hurrying up and down with trays of canapés and champagne balanced on their hands. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, breathing hard. Her head was buzzing and her heart felt like it was about to leap out of her chest. She bent over, hands on knees, breathing deeply.

It was too much. It was too fast. It was too soon. It was … Emma groaned and slid down the wall, dress bunched around her thighs as she wrapped her arms around her shins and rested her forehead on her knees.

“Daddy, where’s Emma?”

“Um, I may have put my foot in it,” Herbert said, turning to his only daughter with a sheepish expression.”

Regina’s eyes narrowed. “What did you say? Did you tease her for being a fan?”

“Yes, but that wasn’t what upset her.”

“You upset Emma?” Regina frowned, her voice a little more dangerous. “How? What did you say?”

“I didn’t know you hadn’t discussed it,” Herbert said, a little defensively.

A heavy weight settling in the pit of her stomach. “Hadn’t discussed what?” Regina asked.

“I just mentioned how you had always wanted children,” Herbert said.

Regina’s jaw dropped. “You said what?”
“Just that,” Herbert said, taking a step back from her daughter who was clearly livid.

“What were your exact words?” Regina said slowly, trying to stop herself from yelling at the man in the middle of his anniversary party.

“Um,” Herbert said, trying to remember. “That you have always wanted kids and that you want to adopt some day. And maybe something about Henry having a little brother or sister.”

Regina was positively fuming by the end of the recollection. Herbert shrank further away.

“You said that to her? Daddy I told you we were taking things slowly. I told you Emma wasn’t ready for all of that. I told you we’ve only been together a few months.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” Herbert said, guilt overwhelming him. “It was stupid. I wasn’t thinking. I didn’t mean -”

“Where is she?” Regina interrupted.

“Um, she said she needed to go to the bathroom but walked off over there,” Herbert said, pointing in the opposite direction of the restrooms. “I lost sight of her in the crowd, I’m afraid.”

Regina sighed. “I’m going to find her. Do not, I repeat; do not, say anything else to Emma if you see her before I do. In fact, I may ban you from ever speaking to her again. If she’s even still here. God, Daddy, how could you?”

“I’m sorry, Princess,” Herbert called after his daughter’s retreating back just as his wife appeared by his side.

“What did you do now?” Cora asked, elbowing him in the ribs and passing him a fresh glass of champagne.

“I spoke,” Herbert said.

Cora rolled her eyes. “You know, after being such a successful politician for so many years, you’d have thought you would have learnt the art of saying the right thing.”

“My honesty was my unique selling point,” Herbert said, his arm now around Cora’s shoulders. “But I fear I may have just sent our daughter and her relationship up shit creek without a paddle.”

Regina pushed her way through the crowd, ignoring the various calls which followed her as she went. She knew she was being rude and should be mingling with the guests but in that moment she didn’t care. All she wanted was to find Emma and apologise to her and explain and convince her that Herbert Mills was a nosey old man who had no idea what he was talking about, even if that wasn’t quite true. Because she did want kids. Had always wanted kids. But that was a conversation which she hadn’t had with Emma yet because it was too soon and Henry had been so sick. It was certainly not something Emma should have heard first from her father, however.

The brunette was almost in tears by the time she reached the far side of the ballroom and stepped out into the corridor. She moved out of the way of a waiter who looked like he was about to drop the tray of glasses which was precariously balanced on his trembling fingertips, and glanced around.

The sight of the blonde slumped on the floor, curled in on herself and her face buried between her legs made Regina’s breath hitch. Was this is? Was this the end?
Tentatively, she took a step towards the huddled woman.

“Emma?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: … let the hating commence! *hides behind computer*
A/N: For those of you who think Emma overreacted, please bear with me. I never make my characters do anything for no good reason … Also, desperate/hateful/loving reviews clearly make me write faster. In case you missed it, there was an important chapter posted yesterday!

She flinched at the sound of her name, curling further in on herself. She had not expected Regina to find her so quickly; had thought she would have more time to gather her thoughts. Slowly, she raised her head.

At the sight of those familiar green eyes, Regina offered a small smile in an attempt at reassurance. Ignoring the fact that they were in a rather public corridor, she moved forward and planted herself on the floor next to Emma, keeping a respectable distance between them even though she was itching to gather the woman into her arms.

“Are you ok?” she asked after a long silence, interrupted only by the clatter from the kitchen which was at the far end of the hallway.

“I’m sorry,” Emma whispered. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“You didn’t embarrass me,” Regina said, confused. “What makes you think you embarrassed me?”

“Running away from your father like that,” Emma said, assuming the man had told his daughter exactly what had happened, prompted Regina to go searching for her so quickly.

Regina sighed. “Daddy told me what he said to you and believe me, he’s the one who should be embarrassed. He had no right to talk to you about that stuff before I did and -”

“So it’s true?” Emma asked. “You want kids?”

Regina shifted a little and turned her body towards Emma. The blonde didn’t react, continuing to stare straight ahead at the cream wall, the occasional flash of a waiter’s hurried legs passing across her static vision.

“I’ve always wanted to be a mother, yes,” Regina said. “Even when I knew I was gay and that I’d never have a so-called ‘typical’ nuclear family, I still wanted children to be a part of my life. I love kids; it’s one of the reasons I trained as a paediatrician. And yes, I’ve been considering adoption for many years.”

Emma’s arms tightened around her shins and she drew even further in on herself. Regina noticed and her heart clenched at the clear distress her girlfriend was in even if she didn’t fully understand what was causing it.

“Honey, please say something,” she said after a few moments. “You’re scaring me.”

“You’re scared?” Emma scoffed. “How do you think I feel?”
“I honestly have no idea,” Regina replied. “I can tell you’re upset but I am confused as to why. Is it because this is all moving too fast? First that stupid comment I made about my father walking me down the aisle and now that buffoon suggesting we’re going to be adopting a kid together?”

“No,” Emma said. “Well, not exactly.”

It was hard to verbalise. She didn’t think many people would understand the deep-seated anxiety she had been carrying with her all her life. She rarely talked about it; finding it easier to keep everything bottled up. The last time she had told someone about these feelings had been with Lily. She supposed that train wreck was a good of a place as any to start.

“I’ve never felt like I was enough,” she said at last.

“You’re enough for me,” Regina said at once.

“Please,” Emma sighed, her eyes meeting Regina’s again. “If you’re going to make me talk about this, please don’t interrupt.”

Regina bit her lip and nodded, a look of apology on her face.

“The only other real relationship I have been in was with Lily. I loved her and trusted her and I let her into my life. I let her into Henry’s life. That was not a decision I made lightly. But I thought she deserved it; I thought she deserved us. She was the first person I let join our little family. And it was great … until she wanted more.”

There was a pause and it took all of Regina’s self-control not to prompt the blonde, not to push her. She knew this was taking a lot out of Emma and wanted to restrain herself, even if it was killing her not knowing.

“She wanted us to have another kid,” Emma said. “She brought it up one day, about the fact that she wanted a child of her own. IVF, she said. She’d been reading up on it. She wanted to carry her own child. As far as I was concerned by that point, she was Henry’s other mother. We’d been together close to two years. She’d been living in our apartment for eighteen months. He even called her ‘Mum’ a few times. She’s been present for almost half his life and then suddenly she turned around and said it wasn’t enough. That Henry wasn’t enough. That I wasn’t enough. We fought about it a few times and I know relationships are supposed to be about compromise but this was a non-starter for me. I didn’t want another child. I don’t want another child. Eventually Lily just stopped mentioning it. Three months later I came home from work one day to find a note saying it wasn’t enough to raise Henry with me; that she needed to have her own child.”

Regina couldn’t help herself; “I’m sorry you had to go through that. I can’t imagine how hard that must have been.”

“I don’t like to talk about it,” Emma shrugged. “It’s easier that way. Henry doesn’t know either. And he never will. It would crush him if he found out the reason Lily left.”

Regina was positively seething with anger at this point. How could anyone leave Emma or Henry? How could the two of them ever not be enough?

“So when your father mentioned that you wanted kids of your own,” Emma continued, “it brought back all these memories. That’s why I overreacted and ran off. I had to get out of there. I had to get away. I couldn’t stay there another second. I … I couldn’t breathe. It was like my whole world was collapsing around me and there’s nothing I can do to stop it. I needed to process this new information about you and what you want.”
Emma took a deep breath and continued. “And then there’s my own childhood. I never told you that I was adopted for the first three years of my life. But then my adoptive parents got pregnant when they thought they could never have their own children. About two months after the baby was born, they shipped me back to the government. It was too much apparently. Their own baby and an adopted three-year-old. It was easy to boot me back, by the sound of it. That’s partly why I never got formally adopted by my parents now; it seemed pointless if they could just go back on their promise to care for me so easily. Even after years with Mum and Dad, it wasn’t until I was sixteen that I finally accepted that it was a permanent home; that they weren’t going to get rid of me. That feeling of not being enough, or too much I suppose in the case of my first home, has been a constant feature in my life. I’ve always been waiting, waiting for those I care about to decide I’m not good enough, not worthy of them, not giving them everything they need. That’s why I’m so wary of starting relationships; because I can’t imagine anyone ever being truly content with just me and Henry but knowing that’s all I can ever give them.

“I already feel like I’m not enough for Henry sometimes. When he was sick, I needed Neal’s blood to make him better. And now his dad is part of his life and he’s so happy, I’m left wondering whether the fact that I raised him myself for so long was a mistake; whether I wasn’t enough as his mother and I should have gone to search for Neal sooner. It’s hard to make sure I’ve got enough money for rent some months. And he never gets everything he asks for at Christmas or for his birthday. There are times when I’m so busy with work that Henry spends more time with Ruby and Billy than he does with me. I love him more than I’ll ever love anyone in the world but I don’t want another child. Henry is it for me. He’s all I’ll ever want or need. He’s enough for me and, I hope, I’m enough for him.”

Emma fell silent at last. Regina waited for a few minutes but when nothing more was said, she assumed Emma was done.

“Can I speak now?” Regina asked quietly.

“Yeah, go ahead.” She sounded despondent, as if she had already resigned herself to Regina’s negative reaction.

“Firstly,” Regina said, reaching over and tangling her fingers awkwardly in Emma’s which were still clasped around her leg, “I love you and I love Henry. Very much. More than I’ve ever loved anyone before.”


“Yes, it is,” Regina said firmly. “And Lily didn’t love you. Not the way I do because I could never imagine leaving you and Henry. Never, Emma. And yes I know this is too fast and I know I scared you with that comment about getting married a few weeks ago. But it doesn’t make it not true. I do want to marry you, Emma. One day. No matter how far in the future that date may be. I want to become a part of your family. I will always want to be a part of your family. As far as I’m concerned, you’re my family now.

“Which leads me onto my second point and I need you to really listen and hear this, Emma, because I need you to believe me.”

A gentle finger curled around Emma’s chin and coaxed the blonde’s head to the side until their eyes locked once more. Regina offered a small smile.

“Go on,” Emma said. “I’m listening.”
Regina nodded and, eyes unwavering from Emma’s, began.

“I never said I wanted my own children. I always imagined my life with children in it, true, but I never cared how they came to be there, as it were. Yes, when I realised I was gay I began to think that adoption was my best option. And, for the record, I would never dream of returning a child I had adopted. The fact that that happened to you was reprehensible on behalf of the system and those parents and I’m truly sorry you went through that.”

“Thank you,” Emma said. “What’s done is done.”

“Anyway,” Regina continued. “I had always imagined that I would adopt one day; it’s true. But you know what I didn’t imagine?” Emma shook her head. “Meeting you and Henry.

“I’ve never dated anyone with a child before,” Regina said after a slight pause to make sure Emma understood the importance of those words. “It’s certainly different but it’s wonderful as well. Again, I know it’s too early for this and I know all this talk of the future is scaring you but I need you to hear this. I’m not going anywhere, Emma. I want to stay right here with you and Henry for as long as you’ll have me. Because you two are giving me everything I ever imagined. You’re more than enough for me. This is the best relationship I have ever had and I want it to last for our lifetimes. I can’t imagine ever being with anyone else. I don’t ever want to be with anyone else. And Henry; God, I love that kid, Emma. I know he’s yours and he’ll never be truly mine but I can’t help but feel maternal towards him. I’ve never said anything before because I didn’t want to overstep and in my role as a paediatrician I’m trained to keep those feelings hidden. But it is undeniable, Emma. I love Henry as if he were my own. I care so much about both of you. So yes, I always imagined my life with children in it and as far as I’m concerned, I’ve got exactly that.”

There was another long, heavy silence as Emma slowly let Regina’s words sink in. The brunette waited patiently, knowing it was crucial Emma be allowed to digest the colossal confession she had just imparted. It was true. Every word of it. But she also appreciated the intensity, the pressure she had just placed upon their relatively new relationship.

“I love you too,” Emma said at last, her voice barely more than a whisper.

“I know you do,” Regina said. “I feel it every time you look at me.”

Emma couldn’t help but smile at that. “Henry loves you as well, you know.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Emma said. “He thinks you’re amazing. As do I. What we have, Regina, it’s special. I know that but -”

“No, there’s no buts, Emma,” Regina interrupted. “What we have is special and amazing and so full of love I know I will never want for anything ever again as long as I have you and Henry.”

“You don’t know that,” Emma said. “You can’t say you’ll ever not want more. You just told me you always imagined having children in your life. All I can offer is a chance to be a part of Henry’s life. A big part, of course. I would love to raise Henry with you. To be co-parents, even. But is it enough?”

“Yes,” Regina said at once. “Yes, Emma. Please, please believe me. I wanted a child in my life. Children, child, whatever. One child or five. I never really cared. And equally, I never cared where the child came from. I know Henry is yours biologically. I understand and respect that you don’t want more children. That’s ok with me. I am more than happy to have Henry as the one, perfect
child in my life. And to be considered a co-parent with you? I’d be truly honoured, Emma. It’s more than I could ever have asked. To be given that title is something I didn’t think you were ready for, didn’t expect you to be ready for. But please hear me when I say this; I have everything I want right here with you and Henry.”

Emma’s eyes scanned Regina’s face, trying desperately to judge the brunette’s sincerity. Regina held her gaze, stoic and determined. She had to make Emma believe her. She had to make the blonde see that she was telling the truth.

“We’re really enough?”

The words were small, hesitant, uncertain, and Emma’s doubtfulness of her own self-worth broke Regina’s heart. She vowed there and then to spend the rest of her life trying to make Emma understand just how amazing and how worthy she truly was.

“You, my love,” she said, shuffling closer and placing her hands on either side of Emma’s face, “are the most incredible woman in the world. And your son is one of the bravest, smartest and most charming children I have ever met. To have the two of you in my life is more than I could ever have dreamed. You are more than enough. You are my everything.”

Tears leaked down Emma’s cheeks at those final words. Regina too, felt her eyes burn. She leaned forward, pressing soft kisses to the wet tracks on Emma’s face, peppering the skin with tiny promises, assurances of her love, of the truth behind the words she had just said. Their lips met at last, salty and sloppy, a desperate, needy kiss as each woman tried to show the other how they felt. Emma buried her face in the crook of Regina’s neck, her body shaking lightly. Regina’s arms pulled her close, wrapped her tightly, safely, a hand rubbing soothingly up and down her back.

“I do want this, Regina,” Emma said when she pulled away and tried to wipe the smudged mascara from the brunette’s tanned skin. “I do want you. Us. I want it all with you. It’s not the commitment I’m scared of or even how fast this relationship is progressing. I can’t imagine ever not being with you and the thought of you in a white dress sends shivers of excitement down my spine. But that feeling of not being enough for you was what held me back; was what made me hesitant. How much I love you was never in question and I’m sorry I freaked out earlier.”

“There is no need to apologise, honey,” Regina assured her. “And thank you for being honest with me about what was wrong. I hope I’ve made you feel better?”

“You always make me feel better,” Emma admitted.

“So do you believe me? What I said? About you and Henry being enough?”

There was a pause, less than a heartbeat but it felt to Regina like the longest wait of her life.

“I do.”

This time it was Emma’s turn to wipe the tears from Regina’s cheeks as the brunette broke down. The two women stayed sat on the floor, crying quietly to one another. They didn’t care about the fact that they were sitting in a corridor, nor that countless waiters had passed by them during the most important conversation of their relationship, if not their entire respective lives. All that mattered was that Emma believed Regina. That Regina had finally told Emma how she felt about the little family. That they were still together. That they would remain together for a long, long time.

Herbert stepped behind his wife and ducked down as he saw his daughter making her way towards
him, Emma beside her. Cora rolled her eyes at his childishness and continued talking to Zelena who was regaling her with tales of her time at university with Regina.

“- and then she said to him, ‘well unless you want to undergo gender reassignment surgery, I guess you’re out of luck’.”

Cora laughed loudly just as the couple reached the group. Regina narrowed her eyes at Zelena, silently scolding her for telling her parents that particular story, before turning her attention to her cowering father.

“Daddy,” she said sternly.

Herbert’s face appeared over Cora’s shoulder even though he was several inches taller than her when standing. “Oh, hello Princess. I didn’t see you there,” he said, stepping out from behind his wife and plastering a smile all over his face.

“I believe you owe Emma an apology.”

“What? No, Regina, it’s fine,” Emma said, her freshly washed cheeks burning at the thought of Herbert ‘Herbie’ Mills apologising to her.

“No, she’s right,” Herbert said. “I shouldn’t have said what I did. I know you guys haven’t been together long and it’s clearly far too early for you to be discussing children.”

“You guys are having a kid?” Zelena asked, butting in as always.

“We have a kid already,” Emma said, her arm sliding around Regina’s waist as she spoke.

“Henry?” came three voices in unison as Cora, Herbert and Zelena all registered what Emma was saying.

“Yes,” Emma said. “We know it’s early days and we’re still navigating the beginnings of a relationship but when it comes to Henry, Regina is definitely an important part of his life. I would be honoured to raise him with her and I know he’d be delighted to have her in his life too.”

“Like a co-parent?” Zelena asked.

“Exactly,” Emma said. “It’s not often I let people into Henry’s life but with Regina, I didn’t have much of a choice. I think she’d wormed her way into both of our hearts before I even realised.”

“I’m not apologising for that,” Regina smirked, her arm now wrapped tightly around Emma’s waist.

“I’m not asking you to,” Emma said. “You’re welcome in our hearts and our lives.”

Regina smiled dopily up at the blonde and craned her neck to place a soft kiss on her lips. Forgetting where they were and who they were in front of, Emma kissed her back, tongue seeking entrance into Regina’s mouth just for a moment before Zelena’s woop brought them back into the room.

“You guys are sickeningly perfect together, you know that?” she said, jokingly as the couple broke apart.

“Yeah, we know,” Regina said smugly.

“Do you want to go and check on Henry?” Emma asked.
“Of course,” Regina said. “Mother, Daddy, we’ll see you later. Zelena, you’re going to want to get as far away from me as possible after you told that story to my mother.”

Zelena just laughed and waved as the couple weaved their way, arms around one another’s waists, through the crowd towards the group of children playing on the far side of the room. Cora and Herbert watched their daughter go, identical smiles on their faces.

“I’m going to need a new fascinator for their wedding,” Cora said, casually.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: one more chapter …
A New Beginning

Chapter Notes

A/N: This is delayed because the moment I started to type would signal the end of this story which I have grown to love. Endings are always bitter sweet but I sincerely hope this one is far more sweet than anything else. Sickeningly so, in fact, with a little sexy time thrown in for good measure. Thank you to all of you who have been on this journey with Doctor Regina, Editor Emma and Sick Henry. If you’re a follower of my work, you may be very interested in the note at the bottom of this chapter. But for now, let’s say goodbye to this little family we’ve been following for over seven months.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Regina glanced at the clock on her dashboard and pushed her foot a little more firmly onto the accelerator. She could not, would not, be late. The building finally came into view just as the previously ample street parking disappeared. She huffed and reversed down the empty road, past the cars of people who were early, and expertly zipped into a free space. She jumped out of the car and, pointing the key fob blindly over her shoulder, she hurried down the street as fast as her heels would allow, early autumnal leaves brushing against her feet.

The gaggle of parents outside of the school were scattered in groups, mothers, fathers and nannies alike chatting together as they waited for their children. She spotted Emma quickly, talking to the mother of a child in Henry’s class. Ashley, Regina remembered as she approached the two blondes. Ashley had a younger child, no more than a year, balanced on her hip.

“Hey,” she said, a little out of breath after her fast-paced walk and the lingering warmth in the September day.

“Hey,” Emma grinned, kissing Regina sweetly and slinging her arm around her shoulder. “Cutting it fine, aren’t you?”

“An emergency case came in five minutes before I was due to clock off,” Regina grumbled. “Apparently I’m not allowed to walk away from patients who are bleeding internally, no matter how important my next appointment is.”

“Well, the rabble haven’t been released yet, so you’re all good. Did you save the patient?” Emma asked.

“Of course,” Regina said. “Well, they went up to surgery but they’ll make it.”

Emma smiled and kissed Regina again, proud of her girlfriend’s day’s work. How many people could say they saved multiple lives every time they walked into the office? Emma loved editing and she believed books and reading were important but their impact wasn’t as tangible as Regina’s job.

“Regina, you remember Ashley, right? Alexandra’s mother and this is Archie.”

“Yes, hello,” Regina smiled. “It’s lovely to see you again.”
“Likewise,” Ashley said. “We were just talking about setting up some sort of regular playdate with Henry and Alex. I know you guys both have demanding jobs and won’t always be able to pick him up. The kids get on well and I thought I could help you two out since I’m still on maternity leave from this one.” She giggled her hip and Archie giggled.

“Yeah, what do you think, babe?” Emma asked.

“It’s a great idea but you know my schedule changes every week. Isn’t that going to just complicate things?”

“I’m here picking Alex up every day,” Ashley said. “Any time you need me to take Henry too, just send me a text.”

“Really?” Regina asked. “That’s so kind of you, Ashley.”

“Not at all. Henry’s a sweet kid.”

“Yes he is,” Regina said, her hand, now resting on Emma’s waist, giving a light squeeze to illustrate that she too thought Emma had done an excellent job raising her son.

“And we’ll repay the favour any time you want,” Emma said. “I know you’ll be needing a break every now and then.”

Regina nodded her agreement. “Yes, I’d be happy to take Alex for a few hours whenever I do have the day off.”

“What is your schedule?” Ashley asked.

“Four days on, two days off,” Regina said. “And occasionally I work nights but that’s pretty rare.”

“You’re a paediatrician, right?” Ashley said.

“Yes,” Regina nodded.

“That’s how we met,” Emma added. “She saved Henry’s life.”

“I did not,” Regina protested.

Emma laughed. “She’s just being modest,” the blonde informed the other mother. “Seriously, without Regina, Henry might not be here today.”

“In that case, if Alex ever gets sick, I’m requesting you as her personal doctor,” Ashley said.

Regina blushed. “There are hundreds of better doctors than me working in London,” she said. Taking compliments had never been something she was comfortable doing.

“I don’t care,” Ashley said. “Emma told me about Henry’s illness and it sounds awful. I have no doubt it took an excellent doctor to make him better.”

Before Regina could protest that really it was Zelena who had been Henry’s primary physician, the doors to the school opened and children spilled out onto the playground. The trio broke apart and turned towards the youngsters running towards them. Regina spotted Henry before Emma and pointed him out. The little boy was walking alongside his friend Roland, the two of them chatting animatedly. Emma’s forehead creased as she noticed, once again, how much smaller Henry was than his classmate. Those three months of illness had certainly put him back somewhat in terms of development. Although Regina had assured her he would catch up and that with an August
birthday, he had always been one of the youngest in his year, she was still worried.

“Henry,” Emma called out, waving and forcing the negative thought from her mind.

“Mum!” the boy shouted back, waving enthusiastically. “Gina!” The surprise in his voice was evident. He hadn’t realised his favourite doctor was going to come and pick him up from his first day in Year 3.

“Hi Henry,” Regina said as the boy reached the edge of the scrum trying to get out of the gate past the teacher on duty. “How was your first day?” she asked through the fence.

“Great. My new teacher is super cool.”

“Yeah? That’s great.” Emma and Regina chorused. Ashley rolled her eyes before spotting her own daughter and waving at Alex who was surrounded by a group of her friends. The girl was going to be trouble when she was a teenager, Ashley predicted, judging by her popularity. She offered her mother a nonchalant nod before turning back to her friends.

Emma waved her hand at the teacher on the gate and Henry was allowed out. He pushed his way gently through the sea of parents and finally broke into a run as he headed toward the two women. He barrelled into Emma’s open arms and was lifted up, his face peppered with kisses.

“Ew, Mum, gross,” Henry protested, wriggling his legs until he was put back down on the floor. Affection was only cool up to a point and then it just became humiliating.

“Hi Henry,” Regina said, holding her own arms out for a hug which Henry willingly gave. Somehow, being seen with Doctor Gina was less embarrassing than his own mother. Although in recent months Doctor Gina had become just Gina. It had been over a month since he had returned to the hospital to have a blood test. Doctor Lena has said he wouldn’t have to come back until after Halloween.

“Mum, my teacher let me choose my own sticker for the peg where I keep my bag,” Henry said, thrusting said item into his mother’s hand, the few thing exercise books in there deemed too heavy after the walk across the playground.

“Yeah? What did you choose?” Emma asked.

“A horse,” he said proudly. “Can we get a horse?”

“And keep it where?” Emma asked, waving goodbye to Ashley who was trying to persuade Alex to leave her friends. Archie had begun to fidget.

“The garden at Gina’s is way bigger than our old place,” Henry reasoned. “He can live there.”

“I’m fairly sure we’re not allowed to keep horses in the garden,” Regina said. “Plus, there isn’t enough grass for your horse to eat. Where did the sudden interest in horses come from anyway?”

“I want a horse like the white one in Tangled. Maximus is cool,” Henry said, ignoring Regina’s reasoning on why keeping a horse in the garden of an apartment block in London was a bad idea.

Emma glanced at Regina and rolled her eyes. With one of Henry’s hands held in each of theirs, they set off towards Regina’s car. Emma had walked to the school, her legs becoming her only form of transport after her bug had finally given out on her a month before. Just as they were passing the gate, Emma paused.
“Hi, Mrs Peters,” she said to the teacher still working on making sure children were leaving the school only into the guardianship of their parents or someone the school had approved. “Can I quickly introduce you to Regina?”

“Right, hi,” Mrs Peters said, a little distracted with her current job to do much more than glance at the brunette.

“Regina will be picking Henry up occasionally from now on,” Emma said. “Can we have her added to the list?”

“Sure,” Mrs Peters said. “You’ll need to get a photo into the office and fill out some papers. The form is on the school website so you can just download it. What’s her relationship to Henry?”

Emma glanced at the brunette and spoke the words to her, rather than the woman on the gate. “Co-parent.”

Temporarily distracted from her duties, Mrs Peters turned to fully look at the trio before her. “Oh, right. Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” Emma said, smiling once more at the teacher. “We’ll get those forms done tonight.”

“Ok, good to meet you, Regina,” Mrs Peters said, offering a genuine smile. “I guess I’ll be seeing you around fairly regularly.”

“That’s the plan,” Regina said.

“Mum, Gina, come on,” Henry huffed, bored of the conversation.

The insistent tugging on their hands spurred the women into action and they continued their journey down the street. Henry climbed into back of the car and was buckled safely into his booster seat. Regina and Emma slipped into the front, one more gracefully than the other, and then they were off.

“Henry, tidy those cars away please,” Emma called. “Dinner will be ready in five minutes.”

The responding grunt from the living room confirmed her son had heard the instruction but she doubted whether the request would be completed before the plates appeared on the new family dining table. She turned back to Regina who was pulling a tray out of the oven.

“Need a hand?” she asked.

“Can you grab the salad from the fridge?” Regina requested. “And there’s half a bottle of white wine in there too if you want a glass.”

“Is that your way of saying you want a glass?” Emma chuckled as she did as Regina asked.

“You know me so well,” Regina said.

“That I do,” Emma said, locating the wine and pouring out a glass. “Here.” She handed it over and dropped a kiss to the exposed skin of Regina’s neck.

As predicted, by the time Emma and Regina carried through the food, Henry’s extensive car collection still littered the carpet. Raised eyebrows from his mother however were enough to spur Henry into action at last and he scrambled around to pile the toys back in the box before rushing over to the table.
A lot had changed in the few weeks Emma and Henry had been living with Regina. The decision had been a mutual one. Although Emma loved her old apartment, she couldn’t deny that the penthouse was a far nicer building in a better location and with a bigger second bedroom for Henry. There was also a third bedroom which would act as a guest room whenever Neal or her parents came to visit. Plus, Regina owned the place and it didn’t make sense to sell it and keep renting Emma’s smaller, lesser apartment. The moment the two of them had moved in, Regina fell in love with her apartment all over again. As well as being beautiful, it now felt like a home.

Alongside Emma and Henry’s existing possessions, the purchase of the family-sized dining table had been the first addition. Emma believed it was important to keep meal times as a communal, communicative affair. Regina, who was so used to eating meals on her own in front of the television, had taken to the new tradition with gusto. She couldn’t believe she hadn’t bought a dining table before. The other biggest change to the apartment had occurred the weekend before when Neal had come down and helped to redecorate Henry’s bedroom which was now bright blue. Emma had been sceptical about the shade but they had agreed to allow Henry to choose the way it was decorated as one of the many presents he had received for his seventh birthday, the month before.

Over dinner, Henry continued to regale the two women with stories of his first day. Although he was at the same school as before, half of his classmates were different, as was the school’s policy to switch up the children between two classes each year. Luckily for Henry, his best friend Roland had stayed in his half. Their new Year 3 teacher, Mr Jackson, had been at the school for many years and from what Henry said, had a natural affinity with children. Henry, for one, had warmed to him at once.

“And every Friday we’re going to do show and tell and we get to bring in something special to us. Each week five of us will show something and tell our friends about it. I said I wanted to go this week.”

“Said or asked?” Emma frowned.

“Said,” Henry replied before barrelling on, “and I want to take in Gina’s stepaspoke. Can I, Gina?”

“My stethoscope?”

“Yeah,” Henry said. “Cos it’s what you used to tell what was wrong with me, right?”

“Sort of,” Regina said. “It’s what I used to listen to your heartbeat.”

“Can I take it?” Henry asked.

“I don’t see why not,” Regina said. “But I think we may need to help you practice saying the name of it a little bit first.”

“Why?” Henry asked. “I know what it’s called. It’s a stepaspoke.”

Emma snorted into her wine. Regina bit her lip, trying to stop her own mirth escaping.

“So, I use my *stethoscope*,” Regina said, emphasising the correct pronunciation, “to hear inside your chest. Do you want to try listening to mine and Emma’s hearts after dinner?”

“I can hear them too?”

“Of course,” Regina said. “It takes years of training to understand what the different sounds mean but everyone can hear the heart beat.”
“Cool,” Henry enthused. “Do you have the stetaspoke with you now?”

“I have a spare one in my medical bag, yes,” Regina said. “My main one is at the hospital but I’ll need that on Friday because I’m working. Are you ok to take my back-up stethoscope.”

Henry pondered this offer. “Is it the same?”

“Identical,” Regina nodded.

“And I don’t have to tell my friends it’s a back-up one not the one you used to tell I was sick?”

“That can be our little secret,” Regina nodded.

“Ok,” Henry grinned. “Thanks Ma.”

Regina blinked and took another gulp of wine.

Later, after Henry had been tucked into his new bunk-bed (another birthday present), a kiss placed on his forehead by each woman, Regina and Emma curled up on the sofa, the television playing quietly in the background as Emma continued to edit her latest project.

“Can I read it yet?” Regina asked, craning her neck up from where her head rested in Emma’s lap and trying to peek at the page.

“Nope,” Emma said, bopping Regina gently on the nose with the edge of the manuscript. “Your father would kill me.”

“My father is indebted to you for the rest of his life after that fiasco at their anniversary party,” Regina said. “Come on, just let me read the first chapter.”

“Nope,” Emma said. “No one sees this until it’s edited and approved by Killian. And while your father might not actually kill me, I don’t want to break his trust as his editor nor as his daughter’s partner.”

Regina huffed and returned her head to the crux of Emma’s legs, face turned towards the television as Emma flicked onto the next page. Regina was itching to read her father’s autobiography. Correction; she was itching to read all of the sections of the book which were about her. Not that she was self-centred but she knew all about her father’s political career, along with the story of how he got into politics. What she was really interested in was how her father was going to talk about the appearance of his only daughter into his life. She thought it was a universal curiosity; to find out how one was perceived by one’s parents. Luckily for her, having a famous politician as a father meant his life was committed to paper for the world to read, herself included. But despite the fact that she was sleeping with the editor of the book, apparently she wasn’t allowed a sneak peek.

She shifted slightly, getting more comfortable, her cheek now resting against the bare skin of Emma’s calf. The flesh was smooth and soft, the faintest hint of Emma’s vanilla moisturiser still lingering upon it, hours after it had been rubbed in. Unable to resist, she placed a soft kiss to the skin. Emma hummed her approval, her fingers coming down to trail through Regina’s hair. The brown locks had grown significantly since the start of the year and now fanned out over Emma’s thighs. At the gentle touch to her head, Regina’s lips kissed the skin again. Another hum.

An idea popped into Regina’s mind. She smirked against the skin before opening her mouth slightly, the kiss becoming warmer, wetter. Emma’s breath hitched. Regina kept her lips pressed firmly against the blonde’s calf.
Emma cleared her throat in an attempt to clear the haze which was taking over her mind. She forced herself to tear her eyes away from the back of Regina’s head and refocus on the manuscript. It was hopeless, however, when Regina’s tongue lightly began to caress her skin.

“Regina,” she husked, tossing the manuscript to one side and leaning down to meet the now upturned face of the brunette in a heated kiss.

Reaching up, Regina tugged the blonde closer, their tongues already duelling for dominance. It had been three days since they’d last slept together and, as Regina suspected, Emma was now turned on. It never took much to get the blonde excited, to be fair; the woman was very easy to distract. Regina’s hands slid back down Emma’s sides as her teeth trapped the pale lip, tongue flickering over the sensitive skin.

Suddenly, Regina was pulling away and scrambling off the sofa, the manuscript clutched triumphantly in her hand. Emma, breathing hard, stared at the brunette.

“You tricked me!” she gasped, jumping to her feet. “Give it back.”

“I want to read it,” Regina pouted, opening the crisp white sheets.

Emma reached over and fisted the papers, pulling them back. Regina relinquished her grip but pouted. “Please, honey,” she whined. “I just want to see what he wrote about me.”

“He said you were devious and trick people into doing things they’re not supposed to,” Emma said, sliding the papers back into her work satchel. “Regina, you know I can’t show you. Please, don’t do this.”

Regina pouted again and grumbled but Emma knew she had given up for the night. She walked to where Regina stood and looped her arms around her waist.

“It’s all good,” Emma assured her. “But you know it’s all going to be good. That man loves you more than anyone else in this world.”

“I know but I want to know exactly what he wrote about me,” Regina reasoned. “I mean, what would you write about Henry?”

“What would you write about Henry?” Emma countered.

Regina pondered that for a moment. The little boy had been a part of her life for over eight months now, three of which had been spent very sick, of course. Now, however, Henry was fit and healthy again and Regina was learning more and more about the little boy’s playful, sociable, funny and intelligent character. Henry was, Regina was certain, the best child on the planet. And she was certainly not bias in any way passing that judgement.

“That he’s the most amazing child I’ve ever met and that he makes me want to be a better person every day just to be worthy of the task of caring for him,” she admitted, looking earnestly up into the face of the boy’s mother. The boy’s other mother. It had only happened a few times but Henry had referred to Regina as ‘Ma’. The trio had sat down and talked about Regina’s increased involvement in his life not long after the anniversary party and he had taken it all in his stride. After all, he was used to his family expanding. Emma and Regina had assured him, however, that Regina wasn’t going anywhere, unlike Lily.

“Tell me about it,” Emma said. “I’ve been trying to be worthy of him for seven years. He’s still too good for me.”
“Not true,” Regina said. “You’re the most incredible mother.”

“You think I’m enough for him?”

“I know you are,” Regina said. This was a subject she had reassured Emma on many times since the blonde had first confessed her fears. It seemed she still wasn’t convinced. “And you know what? With both of us, that boy is going to want for nothing for the rest of his life. He has two mothers now, Emma, and Neal. Plus, his number of grandparents has grown significantly. You know my mother wants to be known as Nan, right? She decided last week.”

Emma laughed. “And what about your father?”

“Pops,” Regina said.

Shaking her head in mild disbelief, Emma said, for the umpteenth time; “I can’t believe Herbert Mills is my son’s grandfather.”

“Is this fangirling over my dad ever going to stop?”

“Nope,” Emma said, kissing Regina’s nose. “And as his number one fan, I’m going to make sure you do not read his autobiography until the proper time. But, if you wanted to continue your attempt at distracting me but with my full attention, I wouldn’t be opposed.”

“What a convoluted way of asking me to take you to bed,” Regina laughed, lacing her fingers with Emma’s and obliging the request by pulling the blonde in the direction of their bedroom.

The door had barely closed before Emma felt Regina’s fingers fumbling to push down her yoga pants. She kissed the eager lips before her as her own hands began to shed Regina of her clothes. Within a few seconds, they were down to their underwear and making their way towards the bed. Regina toppled backwards onto the soft mattress, Emma landing on top of her, mouths still fused.

Regina’s earlier activities, short though they had turned out to be, had lit a fire in Emma and she quickly began to kiss her way down Regina’s chest, removing her bra and latching onto a taut nipple. Continuing southwards, her tongue laved over the soft planes of Regina’s stomach, twirling into her belly button before she climbed off the bed and onto her knees, tugging Regina towards her so her hips were resting on the edge of the bed. Underwear removed, Emma glanced up the body before her, green eyes meeting brown at last.

Emma reached up, fingertips caressing Regina’s stomach. The brunette flinched, her body both ticklish and intensely aroused. Although Emma’s mouth was mere inches from the older woman’s core, her mind had momentarily forgotten what she was supposed to be doing. Instead, her fingers splayed out over Regina’s abdomen. The brunette frowned slightly, shifting onto her elbows and trying to work out what Emma was looking at.

“Honey?” she said softly after a full minute of the blonde staring reverently at … something. “Are you ok?”

“Are you sure you don’t want to have a child of your own?” she blurted out, her fingers tensing slightly on Regina’s stomach.

Brown eyes widened. “What? No, Emma,” the doctor said. “I told you, biology doesn’t matter to me. All I wanted was a child in my life. I have that. And I had never really thought about IVF. I’ve seen enough women give birth to be thoroughly put off by the idea. Adoption was the only option I really considered.”
“Do you want to do that then?”

“Adopt? Honey, I told you. Henry is all I need.”

“I know that,” Emma said. “I mean, do you want to adopt Henry?”

Regina sat up, heart hammering in her chest. Had Emma really just offered her a chance to become Henry’s legal parent? Ok, they had been referring to one another as co-parents for months but somehow this was something so much more meaningful. She gazed down into Emma’s face, the blonde waiting patiently for an answer. Hands moved up to cup Emma’s cheeks, drawing the blonde up until their lips met in a kiss so filled with love that tears prickled in Emma’s eyes.

“Yes,” Regina whispered, her own voice thick with emotion. “Yes, Emma, yes. I’d be honoured to adopt Henry.”

“I’ve already spoken to a lawyer about it,” Emma admitted. “And Neal. We’ve agreed to draw up papers which means Henry will have three legal parents.”

Regina wiped tears from her own eyes before brushing away Emma’s too. “You really want me to adopt Henry?”

“I really do. I know how much you love him and if, now I’m only saying this because none of us knows the future, but if we didn’t work out as a couple, you’d still have rights to Henry and he’d still be a part of your life. But I hope we’re going to be together forever, of course. And,” she swallowed, giving herself a moment to be sure she believed what she was about to say, “I wouldn’t be opposed to looking into adopting another child in the future as well.”

Fresh tears rolled down Regina’s cheeks. It hadn’t bothered her that Emma didn’t want to have more children. She was more than happy being a co-parent to Henry. The boy was all she needed. And yet, when Emma had said those words, something inside Regina was awoken. She had always imagined herself caring for a baby and Henry was far beyond that stage. But now; she and Emma could raise a child together, give a forever home to a child like Emma, one who had been abandoned to the system in need of love and stability.

“Really?” Regina said. “You really mean this? Because I don’t need to do that Emma. I don’t need anything other than you and Henry. You know that. But if you offer me this option and I begin to get my hopes up only to have them dashed -”

“No one is dashing anywhere,” Emma assured her, kissing her softly. “I’m not suggesting we go to an agency tomorrow but the past couple of months have got me thinking. I did a pretty good job with Henry and with you by my side, perhaps I could do it again. In fact, I think I want to do it again. But why make another child using some expensive scientific method when there are so many unwanted children out there.”

“You weren’t unwanted, Emma,” Regina said.

“I wasn’t wanted,” Emma said. “And I’d like the opportunity to tell a child like me that they are wanted. I know how it feels to grow up without a family and if I can save a kid from going through that, I want to.”

“Are you sure?” Regina asked.

“I’m sure,” Emma said. “One day. Maybe in a year or so. Maybe after we’re married.”

“We’re engaged?” Regina asked.
Emma laughed. “Not yet. Don’t worry, you didn’t forget my epic proposal.”

“Who said you were the one who was going to propose?” Regina asked.

“I just am,” Emma shrugged.

“How do you know I’m not planning something already?”

“Are you?”

“No,” Regina admitted. “But I could have been.”

Emma laughed again. “Ok, well while you start thinking about this proposal which isn’t going to happen because I’m going to get there first, please may you lay back down so I can make you come?”

“Your tongue on my clit and planning proposals don’t go well together but ok,” Regina said, kissing Emma’s lips once more before laying back down.

No sooner had her head hit the pillow did Emma’s tongue swipe enthusiastically through her folds. She groaned and gripped the duvet, anchoring herself to something solid as her body began to tremble. It never took long for her to come with Emma’s tongue between her legs. When the blonde pushed two fingers inside her, Regina’s hips canted up to meet the thrusts.

Emma smirked into the soft, wet flesh, lapping a little harder as she pumped. Regina’s moans filled the room, her hips rocking rhythmically. Emma buried her face closer, her lips seeking out the tight little nub and sealing around it. A third finger joined the two already squeezed tightly into her girlfriend, causing her name to spill from Regina’s lips.

When she came, Regina’s hands flew to Emma’s hair, woven into the golden tresses and tugging the blonde impossibly closer, riding the mouth which had pushed her over the pleasurable edge. When her body finally stopped trembling, she released her hold on the blonde who emerged from between her legs, smiling proudly. She licked her lips, savouring the taste of Regina and climbed up the spent woman, laying herself carefully on top of her so every inch of their bodies was touching.

“So, how did that proposal plan come?” she asked when brown eyes slowly blinked open.

“Great actually,” Regina replied.

“Really?”

“Yes, I’ve got it all figured out.”

“I’d better get planning mine then. Don’t want you to get in there first and steal my thunder,” Emma joked.

“Too late,” Regina said. At Emma’s answering frown, she craned her head up to kiss the blonde, tasting herself on the pale lips. When she pulled away, she locked eyes with the young woman, the woman who had opened up her heart, her life and her family to Regina. The woman who had given her a son. The woman who was willing to raise another child with Regina. The woman who had changed her life in the best, most unimaginable way simply by loving her. “Marry me, Emma Swan,” she whispered into the dim room, her eyes sparkling with happy tears for the second time that evening.
It took a few seconds for Emma to register the words then, slowly, the biggest smile Regina had ever seen spread over her face before her mouth pressed hard against Regina’s parted lips, a mumbled ‘yes’ consumed by their passion as their tongues met once more.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I hope this story did the difficult subject matter justice and I am proud to have finally completed this work. But I am not about to stop writing! My problem? I have no ideas for new AU stories! So, here comes my request. If any of my darling readers have a storyline they would be happy for me to attempt (I cannot guarantee what direction your prompt will take me), please leave a review on this story or message me some inspiration. This can be something as simple as “Emma is a bar tender, Regina is a customer’ or a far lengthier synopsis, I don’t mind. I sit awaiting your ideas with baited breath. Bear in mind Crazy Changes was from a reader’s prompt which was supposed to be a one-shot so I really do take your suggestions on board. And with that, I sign off with a final thank you for your loyalty and an anticipatory thank you for your forthcoming ideas. Love to you all!

End Notes

Reviews are love ...

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!