A random portal opens up and swallows Emma and Regina, whisking them away to the Xenaverse. In a land without magic, with the help of the Warrior Princess and her Battling Bard, will our girls make it home to their family in one piece? What evil will follow them home and threaten all they love?
ass. We just don't mention his name. Not after he tries to kill your child.

Triggers: hurt\comfort, mention of child abuse, spousal abuse, rape, marital rape, torture, graphic violence, dismemberment, impalement, dark humor, murder, war, mental illness, obsession, major character death, minor character death, everyone dies.

I borrowed script lines, scenes and characters from both Once Upon a Time and Xena Warrior Princess to both provide history within each fandom, no infringement intended. I do not own these characters, they own me and this work is for entertainment only.
A whirling purple and gray funnel cloud opened over a pond on a cool, clear day; two screaming figures dropped from it into the water. A wet blonde surfaced, startled, spraying water from her mouth. She looked around frantically, her warm breath panting out puffy white clouds and she called out, "R'Gina?" Emma Swan whipped her head around searching the black water all around her.

"Gi?!" She screamed with proper terror, "Raaahh-geeee-NAAAAA!"

*She fell! She was there and then she was gone!*

They were out on what seemed like a normal incident report follow-up. Regina was at the station
when Emma got the initial call about the mines and insisted on going with the blonde to check it out. They were walking towards the top of the collapse when suddenly Regina was swallowed by a mini hurricane and before Emma had a chance to register what happened; she ran the few steps to where the brunette disappeared and leapt into the spinning cloud after her.

Suddenly a dark wet head surfaced a few meters away from Emma; relieved, she lapped over to her friend.

Regina Mills, exasperated, out to the dog paddling blonde, "What the hell? Only we would fall through a portal to who knows where and land in a freezing cold lake!" As Emma reached her companion, she waded in front of her, noting the bluish tinge already starting to form in her friend's lips. Stuttering through chattering teeth, Emma said, "We need to get out of it before we freeze to d-death."

If we freeze to death in this stupid lake, Henry would never know what happened to his mothers. Emma motivated herself and then her friend, "R'Gina. S-sh-shore. N-now."

The drenched women dragged themselves out of the water, both shivering violently. Emma grabbed the small woman by her upper arms, rubbing them, pulling her closer, and stroking her back, trying to share body heat. Regina leaned into her once nemesis, now friend, grateful for the warming gesture.

"W-we need f-fire Emma," the small voice said into the taller woman's collarbone. "Otherwise w-we will die here."

Emma focused immediately on the task at hand, trying desperately not to think about the terror she had felt before Regina's head surfaced from the lake. She searched around their location and, with a final squeeze to Regina's shoulders, sprang into action; gathering up sticks that can be used for kindling, dropping the collected pile at the Queen's feet.

Regina circled her hands together trying to summon a fireball. Unsuccessfully.

"Great! Well, wherever we are, there's no magic!" She plopped down on the dry grass, pouting just a bit, "Wherever 'here' is."

"You grew up in the Enchanted Forest, R'gina, don't you know h-how to get a f-fire s-s-started? You know, without magic?"

With flat black eyes, Regina straightened her shaking form, "I was r-r-royalty Emma. What do you think?" She added as an afterthought, "Besides, I've never been without access to magic, so no."

"At least you were around trees!" Emma countered, smiling wide at the mock scowl on Regina's face.

Thundering hooves against earth pulled the women's attention, and they both turn in the direction of the galloping sound and Regina scrambled to her feet once more.

A muscular golden mare, standing nine feet tall, cantered toward them. An obvious war horse of both grace and beauty, carrying a leather-clad warrior woman, equal in attributes to her mighty steed. Midnight black hair bouncing around thick muscular shoulders; the woman eyed the strangers.

Emma noted the Amazonian look of the woman and thought she felt familiar. As the mare slowed to a stop a few meters from the two drenched women, Emma instinctively stepped in front of Regina, putting herself between the blue-eyed warrior and her friend.
Regina immediately eyed the sword on the woman's back and assuming menace from the stranger, stepped closer to Emma. Suddenly freezing was no longer the only option for their untimely deaths.

The woman rider dismounted with ease, scrutinizing the pair with eyes of steel, noting their wet demeanor, unusual dress, and defensive posturing. The warrior's stone mask slipped with the hint of a smirk. "I won't hurt you," she reassured, "I am just investigating the cyclone that formed over the lake. We saw it from our camp east of here."

"We?" Emma inquired, rigid in her defensive stance, her eyes caught a glimpse of a round metal object fastened to the woman's hip, her eyes saucerized with knowing astonishment.

"Wait. No friggin way! Are you, are you Xena?"

A scoff came from behind the blonde, "The Warrior Princess? Please." The Mayor's statement dripped with sarcasm. The statuesque warrior, gave away nothing, again, eyed their odd, yet very wet clothing, then replied, "OH, you've heard of me then." It wasn't really a question, more of a habitual response to the blonde's accusation. She stood awaiting the inevitable fear in the two strangers eyes that never came.

"Holy Crap!" Emma exclaimed, struck with what Xena interpreted as a bout of hero worship; the only other reaction with she was familiar. With a wide smile, the blonde quoted her favorite childhood opener, "A land in turmoil cried out for a hero! It's Xena! A mighty princess forged in the heat of battle!" That got an eyebrow raise from the dark-haired beauty. Emma suddenly realized she sounded nuts and quickly added, "I've... heard... all your stories." She giggled, "Xena."

Regina disturbed by the blonde's outburst sighed and stepped out from behind the gushing fangirl and eased into her queenly persona, "Hello, Xena, is it? I'm Regina Mills, Your Majesty if you please. If you are the real Xena, where is Gabrielle?"

Xena's eyes narrowed, and Emma turned and said through clenched teeth, "Rah-gee-na!"

Regina waved the blonde off, knowing it would push the Sheriff's buttons enough to refocus her attention. "Yes, yes Emma, but the leather-bound vixen always has that annoying little blonde around; it's practically a trademark." Looking over at piercing blue daggers, Regina continued, trying, in her own way, to appease, "Everyone loves the little brat." Smiling her toothy grin, she added thoughtfully, "Well, it could be just the leather."

Emma laughed nervously, jumped in front of her majesty and held her shaking hands up and announced, "Xena, we fell from a pretty big height and landed in the water." Xena lifted an eyebrow and Emma continued, "We are cold and wet and... and... friendly."

Xena smiled with the wet blonde's stammering when the shorter brunette rounded the blonde and demanded, "We're friendly. Emma, did you just tell Xena Warrior Princess that we," she pointed between them, "are friendly?"

Emma turned her head, "Well, we are! Most of the time!" Emma turned to face the exasperated mayor and comically signaled with her eyes for Regina to cool it.

"Oh, Emma! Quit acting like she is going to torture us! She isn't a bloodthirsty warlord anymore!"

Emma fully turned around to stare unbelievably at the Queen. "Regina, how do you know she was a bloodthirsty warlord?"

Xena wrinkled her eyebrows as she thought if she should be offended at the term bloodthirsty
warlord. She'd always considered herself a better strategist than a fighter. A successful campaign isn't merely the obliteration of the other side. Keeping your own men alive in the process of taking over the opponent - that's the key. She pursed her lips together as the two strangers continued.

Regina satisfied she had the center floor, dropped the queen act and rolled her eyes, as she admitted she would watch the show every week. Successfully capturing the blonde's attention, she smiled smugly.

Emma, seeing her friend in a new light, exclaimed, "YOU are a Xenite? How did I not know this about you?"

Xena, wholly forgotten at this point, cleared her throat, "A Xena-what?" The stoic mask of the warlord slipped off with a jolt.

Regina gave the Sheriff a small smirk, glancing up into green eyes, "I also have a... thing... for leather... It," she added with an impossibly wide smile, "inspires me."

Emma's cheeks burned bright at the memories, both real and from her fantasy collection of the Mayor in her Victorian corsets and gowns, and whispered, "Pretty much."

Regina looked up, addressing the warrior. "A Xena Fanatic. Your tales are quite popular where we come from dear." Her dark eyes flicked down taking in the muscles, the tan bare legs, the leather, the armored cleavage, finally settling upon captivating blue eyes under a clean jet black frame. She put herself front and center and the gaze of the warrior was solely upon her; more importantly, not on her Sheriff.

"And where is that exactly?" Xena drawled, eyeing up the feisty little beauty herself.

Emma cleared her throat and voiced, "We need to get dry, but the short version is, we may be stuck here and would appreciate your help."

Regina nodded her agreement and added, "Start a fire won't you, Xena?"

The warrior bit the inside of her cheek and silently dug into Argo's saddlebag and pulled out a flint and kindling pack. She pointed Emma to a pile of dead branches and when the woman complied she lit the small pile the women had already collected. She tossed the Mayor a bedroll and a saddle blanket and said, "You two strip or you'll end up with the coughing sickness. I'll be back."

"Where are you going?" Regina asked catching the offered warmth with minimal grace.

"To get my little brat," the warrior princess drawled, "Your Majesty."

For a while Emma has had a tight handle on this... infatuation with the Mayor. It began when the Queen first started apprenticing the Sheriff in the ways of magic on Pan's Island. They'd barely gotten a start on the regular occurring lessons when they all lost a year and she and Henry were
separated from the people she'd grown to love.

They had resumed lessons after the third curse brought Emma and Henry back to town, but then another catastrophe happened, and another. They stopped lessons and started tag team blasted the baddies. Blasting was easy. It was all the other stuff she didn't know how to do. Like read Elvish, or conjure or cast spells. Whenever anything like that was needed, she relied heavily on the brunette’s vast knowledge. Watching her wield her power was pretty intense, and out of that intensity, and the woman’s other assets, an infatuation was born.

An infatuation that was buried and hidden and has never even seen the light of day. It couldn't. The Mayor was not interested in Emma that way. She never gave an inkling to anything beyond platonic companionship and a co-parenting friendship of their teenaged son. The brunette was clearly into men, and that was something Emma could never be, so she stuffed her feelings away and never crossed that line.

Of course, Emma has had her own dalliances with men. Neal Cassidy had given her their son and at the time the boy was conceived, she honestly loved him. However, before Neal, there was Lily. She had trusted Lily in ways she never trusted again, but Lily had broken her heart. After Lily, women hadn't been an option as far as she was concerned; it hurt too much. When Neal came into her life, he showed her what finally belonging felt like. Of course, that was another instance where fate screwed her over and broke her heart once more. After Henry, she carved a self-destructive path across her twenties with all the wrong kinds of people.

It wasn't until she came to Storybrooke that she started to feel old longings of something deeper than the hook-ups she bounced between. The bonds she formed with the people of Storybrooke opened her heart back up to possibilities. She'd tried to force things to work in a relationship that felt disproportionate and in the end, realized she was holding on for all the wrong reasons.

He hadn't moved her the way others did.

Like with Regina. There, of course, was desire, the woman is striking; however, it was the passion Mayor Mills drew out of the Sheriff that hooked the blonde. Regina was fire and Emma a moth. It took some time for the blonde to learn how close she could get without being burned and for a time thought she was developing a masochistic side solely for the brunette. Emma daydreamed about how she could wipe that insanely seductive smile off of the Queen, but never ever attempted to do such a thing.

Truth be told, they'd worked hard to get to a point where their friendship was almost effortless, or as effortless as either of them could make it. Emma loved the woman, deeper than any sexual desire could displace and that always halted any casual considerations for more. Complicated didn't entirely cover it, and for the sake of her son and her treasured friendship, Emma kept a tight lid on desires unfulfilled.

Regina slipped the thick blanket over her shoulders and stepped back toward the fire. She noticed the blonde hesitated with the removal of her clothing and she smirked wickedly at the chance to tease her friend. "Come on, Miss Swan. Xena is correct. The air is much warmer out of those wet clothes."

"It's fine, I'm-"

"Nonsense Emma," the Queen scolded, "strip."

The blonde's brows furrowed and she turned from the Mayor with a scowl and began removing her wet clothing. She got down to her underwear and turned back and stood next to the fire. The Mayor
was right. It was warmer standing almost nude than it had been in her soaked clothes. She held one of her hands up to the modest fire and relished in the tingles the heat caused across her frozen skin. The other hand covered her bare breasts, and her entire body shivered as it thawed.

"Emma, finish undressing and come under the blanket with me."

Emma shook her head and attempted to give a solid reason as to why she was declining the offer, but the brunette insisted in that no-nonsense way she has, that prevents her from arguing. She felt the Queen's eyes on her as she slid her lacy black thong over her hips and hung it next to her leather jacket. With one hand cradling her chest and the other covering her mound she quickly made her way over to where Regina was sitting.

The Queen held the thick blanket open gesturing to the woman to sit and once she did she draped the warm material over pale shoulders. "There, that's better, right?"

"Thanks," Emma replied and made herself comfortable. As comfortable as she could be next to the nude brunette.

Running her fingers through her slick black hair, Regina quipped, "Next time we fall through a portal to some unknown land we need to pack a hairbrush!"

"And a lighter," Emma added dryly. That got a genuine laugh from the Queen and Emma was able to relax a little.

"And a lighter!" the Queen repeated as if making a list.

Just then, hoof beats rolled up to their makeshift camp. Xena's controlled, emotionless mask was firmly in place; however, it did not take away from her considerable beauty.

Gabrielle slid off Argo first, staff in hand, with a huge grin ear to ear. Her short blonde hair curled around her ears, her warm, friendly green eyes taking in the waterlogged strangers huddled under one of Argo's blankets. "Hi! I'm-

"Gabrielle the battling bard from Potidea, and part-time Amazon Queen?" Emma finished. Gabrielle looked back at Xena, mouth agape.

The warrior just shrugged, "Guess you are just as famous as the Warrior Princess, my little bard."

Regina cut in, "Your... scrolls... have crossed," she eyed Emma thoughtfully, "into other lands," she finished carefully. This information flushed Gabby's fair, sun-kissed skin, and she revealed a smile of pure pride. She never thought her works would amount to much more than spare dinars for Xena and herself to get a room now and again.

"You see Gabrielle? I've always said your work is important. Clearly, I am not the only one who thinks so," Xena said as she removed Argo's burden from her tall, muscular back.

Gabrielle waved a hand at her in an awkward, self-conscious response to the compliment her partner gave her, and diverted the attention to the task at hand, "It is going to be dark soon, let's make camp here." It was second nature to the women, each having their own jobs, working as one to complete the task quickly.
"So I hear you need some help?" Gabrielle inquired as she riffled through one of the larger bags pulling out two extra white cotton shifts. They were short on Xena, but everything was, and covered her completely, which everything does. She handed them to the brunette, "Here... put these on. It will warm you up faster," she lingered, waiting for an introduction that Regina did not give.

The Mayor stood without modesty and took the offered clothing giving the longer of the two to Emma. She pulled the one she kept for herself over her head and stood between the two blondes, giving her friend privacy. "So," she addressed her hostesses, "what can I do to help make this charming... little spot home for the evening?" Pinning an eye on the taller woman she was pleased when the warrior put her right to work.

Emma slipped her own nightgown on during the perfectly timed distraction and stood, pulling at the bottom of the very short shirt. She looked into the face of a little blonde warrior appreciating her assets, and she blushed.

"Thank you, Gabrielle. I'm Emma, and that's Regina."

"They fit like that on Xena too," the blonde Queen offered, realizing she got caught staring. "You tall girls. Um-hmm."

Emma's flush turned crimson at the comment. "I'm not tall... not like," she motioned over to the Warrior Princess.

Gabrielle replied with a chuckle and shrugged, "Well, who is?"

Emma flashed a polite smile and tugged at the front of the shift, "I think I would feel more, covered, if I put my, uh," she looked over at her wet panties.

Gabrielle met her gaze. "Oh! Yeah, I'm sure. Let's... um... here." She pulled down the black lace fabric and grabbed a flat rock, setting it nearly in the fire. She placed the damp panties on the now quickly warming rock. "Have a seat, uh, Emma, and you can tell me your story!" Before Emma could speak the bard loudly bellowed, "Xeeenaaaa! The monster is awake and wants RABBIT STEW!"

Without looking she knew she got an eye roll with the reply, "Yes your worship-" A fantastic smile spread across the bard's face, and her green eyes twinkled, "Now. Start from the beginning!"

Emma sat back down and pulled the blanket back over her shivering frame more than a little sorry Regina was no longer under it with her. "The beginning huh? Well- " As she told Gabrielle her tale, she watched as the bard expertly flipped her underwear on the rock, test them for dryness and handed them back to her.

Emma laid back to slide them on, still toasty, warming her nicely. "Woo, those are, really... sexy Emma." Emma glanced over at Regina who was helping Xena by cutting up vegetables for Her Majesty's stew. "Thanks," she absently replied. Gabrielle noted the look immediately. Heh, been there, done that.

Regina Mills took up the duties Xena assigned, eager to lead the tall warrior away. She wouldn't admit to herself that jealousy motivated her actions, but the way the blonde reacted to the tall, dark princess dug up old feelings felt on an island with a one-handed imbecile. What she knew was that
she didn't like it in the least. When the Amazonian woman returned with her kills, Regina opened
dialog to get more of an idea of what they were dealing with, "I find that a character such as
yourself lives a life far different from the stories that are told."

"Is that so?"

"Indeed." She looked over to Emma huddled under their blanket smiling at whatever the blonde
warrior was saying to her.

"Is that why your friend looks at me the way she does?" Xena handed her a thin blade and several
dried vegetables and set the woman to task.

"Perhaps. It's likely Emma looked up to your tales in a moment of her life where there was little for
her to hope for," Regina replied sadly. Even after all these years she still held the guilt of Emma's
childhood. The Sheriff never talked about it to her of course, but Snow has alluded to it being
unpleasant for the woman.

"I see."

"In your stories, as told in our realm, there is a mysticism and magic in your realm, by way of gods
and the supernatural; is that accurate?"

Xena nodded her head and added detail, "We have gods."

"Are they of flesh and bone or myth?"

"Flesh. Unfortunately."

"Zeus, Hera, Hades, etcetera?"

Xena nodded as she sliced up the meat and added it to the pot of vegetables Regina had expertly
cut. She allowed the woman to guide the conversation, noting the interrogative feel of the smaller
brunette's questions, and awaited the moment when the woman would show her hand. However,
that moment didn't come as quickly as she thought it would; the younger woman clearly had skill.

Noticing the warrior start to close up with her intrusive questions, the Mayor turned their
conversation to a lighter, more superficial path as they finished up making their dinner.

Gabrielle took in the story, the whole story, without judgment or disbelief. From evil queens to the
orphaned daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming. Wondrous tales of other worlds and
dimensions, portals and magic. Impossible stories. Stories Gabrielle was familiar with but thought
they were the works of imaginative bards, not actual people.

"So, now I know my scrolls didn't jump through a magic cyclone to another realm, how-?" the bard
started.

"Well, I don't know really. You see..." Emma said carefully, "there's this show, like a play," she
corrected, stumbling, "sort of, with many many... acts... that gets played all over our world for
millions of people... uh... of the adventures of Xena and Gabrielle, but obviously with some
differences, you are clearly of a completely different realm, the show.. er.. play, is set in... my
realm... er... Earth's uh... history. Greek history, specifically."

Emma let that soak in before she continued. "It is rather odd, the few realms I've traveled to, they
were also based on stories that are told in my realm, but never based on actual historical ideas and
facts. I don't think..." She pondered that for a moment.

"Well, what about Dr. Whale?" Regina offered up from nearby, "His monochrome land had inspired a book set in Germany."

"Yeah, R'Gina, but loosely based; the guy doesn't even have a German accent! Xena," she clarified, "the show, had actual historical figures from Greece in it." She looked over at the two women, "Not that I can presume everything shown in the show is factual. I mean there's a good chance that it's not." Emma looked back to meet the gaze of the Mayor and gave a little smile.

"Greek, huh?" The warrior piped up from her much-studied dinner.

"Way to contribute sweetheart." Gabrielle patted her mate on the forearm.

"Like you know what a Greek is, my bard?" Xena shot back, pride slightly wounded.

"Just how would I know what a Greek is, my love? I'm not even sure I understand this portal thing!" Gabrielle smiled at their guests.

"Portals are like doors that can go to different worlds in the blink of an eye," Regina said plainly.

"Ohhhhhh," the duo said in unison, which got a snicker from Emma.

"The cyclone you saw - that was a portal. We fell through it from our world to yours," the Mayor said and placed her empty wooden bowl down and huddled back under the blanket with Emma.

Gabrielle tried to put the tale together and summed up, "So, in your realm," pointing at Regina, "you are the Evil Queen, who cast a dark curse that banished her parents," pointing at Emma before continuing, "and a bunch of other people that lived in your world to Emma's realm, but not really Emma's realm because she was born in your realm, but her parents put her in a magical, uh tree? Right?"

They both nodded, and she continued, "On the day she was born, which transported her to the same realm that you," pointing back at Regina, "and her parents were banished. Why did they do that again?"

Regina took over, "Only the savior could break the dark curse."

Gabrielle nodded in comprehension but then asked, "But wait, you were an infant. How was she supposed to..."

Emma, looking a little sad, jumped in, "Storybrooke was suspended in time. I grew up outside of the curse, where time progressed normally, and my son was the only one who could safely leave the cursed town because he wasn't cursed and the only one of us who was born in Earth's realm. So he did, and found me."

"Uh, right. Okay, how did your son," pointing at Emma, "get into the cursed town?" Gabrielle asked.

"I adopted him when he was an infant," Regina said flatly. Emma took her hand under the blanket, looked into her deep brown eyes, and Regina continued, "Henry, our son, is a remarkable young man."

Emma added sadly, "I gave him up because I didn't think I would be good for him."
Xena's eyes lowered with complete understanding, her partner put a soothing hand on her knee and squeezed. *Different situation my love, this isn't about Solan. Stay with us.* With the unspoken sentiment, Xena pushed the dark thoughts from her mind. Gabrielle continued innocently, "So, but... were you still evil when you took Henry in, Regina?"

Regina thought about the question, but before she could answer, Emma jumped in, "Regina is a wonderful mother, her heart is not evil. She could still love, and she loved, *loves*, my son. Everything that Henry is, all his wonder, his strength of character, his intelligence, is because he has Regina for a mother. I gave him away so he would have a better life. A better life is what Regina gave him. In return, Henry brought out the hero that has always been inside Regina. Uncontrollable circumstances led a sweet, kind, young girl to close off her heart for good..." Emma trailed off. She was fully aware of the astonished look on her friend's speechless face but dared not make eye contact, for the woman would see more in her eyes then Emma could bare to share. A squeeze of her hand under the blanket said it all.

"Okay," the warrior interjected, seeing the apologetic look on her bard, "So fast forward to you accidentally falling through this portal..."

The women recounted what they knew about the cave-in and discussed how portals were made and how seemingly impossible it is. Regina laid a heavy breath and said, "Whatever made that portal ripped a hole in the fabric of space to create it." She looked to her sheriff and added, "We need to get home."

Emma silently nodded her agreement and Regina continued, "Their gods are real, Emma; if they have magic, perhaps there's somewhere here our magic will work."

Emma looked up and said, "Mount Olympus."

"We can't get to Mount Olympus. Not without help," Xena looked to her bard and the blonde nodded in silent agreement.

"We can go to Artemis' temple in the heart of Amazon territory."

"She'll help us?" Emma asked hopefully.

"It's worth an ask from her most favored mortal," Xena smirked and put her hand on the bard's knee.

Gabrielle took the chance when the two brunettes picked up the dishes to sit closer to the shy blonde. She spoke extra quiet, knowing full well Xena's impeccable ears could hear them if she were not already in full warrior protection mode. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to suggest... anything... about Regina."

"No," Emma looked up into the green pools of sincerity, "I know. I'm just protective of her. She really has worked very hard to work out her demons."

With a curious smile, Gabrielle asked, "So, how long have you two, you know... been together?"

Emma started to answer, but then realized the other blonde meant as a couple, and her face stoned up and flushed a deep red. "We're not... I mean, it isn't like that, she doesn't... um... we don't... well... she doesn't think that way about me. Or even women, I guess."

Gabrielle smiled slowly, almost sly, "Really? Could have fooled me." The sheriff glanced over at Regina stroking Xena's bicep and laughing at something the warrior was saying.
"Well, yeah, of course - it's Xena." She looked over at her friend as she laughed at something Xena said and once again touched the warrior's forearm.

"Even if she does… I mean, I just don't want to mess up our friendship. You know? It took us so long to get this far." Gabrielle nodded in complete understanding.
Chapter 3

The group of women made their final arrangements for sleep, and the Sheriff stood and motioned for Regina to get comfortable. They would be sharing the single bedroll and the Mayor, of course, laid down closest to the fire. Emma held their blanket and looked down at her friend as she wiggled around trying to get comfortable. With her knees bent and her elbow curled up into a pillow the brunette settled.

Emma knelt behind her and mimicked the pose forming the large spoon around her queen, then carefully draped the blanket around them both. As quiet settled over her, Emma's bottled up fear came crashing down and she considered the brunette's plan more carefully. She needed more information about the gods this realm had and what kind of creatures they could possibly be. Would they be borderline annoying and basically harmless, as they are on the show? Or would they be far darker, more sinister as with Rumplestiltskin or even the Evil Queen? They needed to know the answers to her questions before they made any definitive plans and with that decision made, Emma closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Emma stirred in the middle of the night when she felt a warm body lean into her. The startled Sheriff parted her eyelids and noticed the coals from their fire were barely visible and noted their warmth was felt even less.

The three large bright moons of the Xenaverse made visibility easy, even without the fire, and she could see the silvery glow of the brunette's natural curls reflect the moonlight. One of the moons was pale silver, around the same size as the real world's during harvest moon, the second was a rosy dust-colored one, slightly larger, and the third was a tiny purple gem that reminded her of Regina's eyes when she raged with magic.

She took a deep breath and then noticed the woman's head was at an odd angle, having lost her arm pillow moving into her current position against the Sheriff. Emma got as close as she dared and slid her arm under the base of the Queen's neck gently guiding the barely disturbed woman into a comfortable spot in the Savior's arms. Her friend hummed deeply in her sleep, and her body grew heavy as she relaxed.

Emma closed her eyes and breathed in deeply, trying to push the memory of watching Regina fall into a black pit of nothing out of her mind. She was here, she was safe, and they would find a way home to their family.

When dawn threatened to peek it's bright head up, Xena was awake, She loved these few moments she had in the morning, quiet, her bard, nature, perfection. She noticed their guests were in a similar position as her and her bard, Emma's Queen in the same position as her own. Her first impression of the brunette woman reminded her of her own Queen's strength, though that was where the similarities stopped. Regina drew innocent curiosity from her, and she wondered how entrenched their relationship ran. It certainly sounded complicated if their discussion over dinner was any indication. There was a strength the strangers each possessed which was only paled in comparison to how they support one another. In very familiar ways to her and Gabrielle.

She looked down at her bard and remembered feeling lost and incomplete before knowing the blonde's love, and she considered to herself what would happen if she were to give the women a nudge in the right direction. Playing matchmaker was more her Queen's idea of fun but the darkness within her, long ago tamed, relished in the idea of needling the dark Queen to irritation, because the fire that raged in that woman was intense, and Xena enjoyed playing with fire. She
Regina stretched, as the first rays of sun kissed her eyelids and she realized she was in someone's arms. Comfortably. Her arm draped over a lace covered hip bone, and she admired the delicate pattern with the tips of her fingers. The warm skin they covered reacted with goosebumps, and the Sheriff stretched, but didn't wake and soon, she was back to puffing sleepy breaths into the Mayor's large wild curls.

Emma...

Regina's sleepy brain realized Emma's abdomen was bare, and because her leg was wrapped around the blonde's upper thighs, she could feel the woman's hip gently pressing into her center.

Emma!

A flash of heat burned into sleepy eyes as the realization startled them open. They adjusted to the morning rays as they lit up the piles of spun gold that was Emma Swan's tangled hair. Her face in shadow, blinded by the intensity of the sun, she looked peaceful, beautiful.

She lovingly recognized the Sheriff's tight jawline; it belonged to their son. She felt warmth in her chest for this woman, and she realized, somewhere along the line, she had started to love her. She considered for a moment if she could just love their son so much she was transferring those feelings to the Sheriff.

The time they'd spent together, during times of crisis or the mundane, had forged this bond between them. She felt it form over their shared fear for their son. That was when the woman stopped being her enemy in Regina's mind. Of course, she'd noticed the obnoxious way Emma Swan would turn everything around and always make the hard choice when the easy one was within arm's reach. Slowly those traits became less annoying and more endearing.

Even when the girl had brought back Marian from the past. Regina was angry. Of course, she was. Not with the blonde as much as with herself. She knew deep down the fairy dust that led her to Robin Hood to begin with, hadn't been meant to be used on her.

She was evil.

Her life was a never-ending tribute to the karmic debt she owed. She eventually saw what the blonde did as a loving gesture to a man she cared about. He was happy, and that was worth her weight in gold to her. She got over the heartbreak, to the credit of the blonde's assistance, and saw herself as a better person for it. Perhaps stepping aside to allow someone she loved to be with their true soulmate would tip the scales. If it had, it wasn't nearly enough to prevent the hardships she'd lived through since then.

Overcoming the villain will be a lifetime engagement.

If only she could get on equal footing, but perhaps there isn't enough of her life left for that hope. There was far too much that stood in the way for her to even consider having anything more than she currently enjoyed with her son's mother. Their currently functional relationship was really all she had the right to ever hope for, and she should be grateful for what the blonde allowed.

The woman cared for the Mayor, Regina could feel it. It took some time for the closed off queen to accept, but she did believe the blonde genuinely cared about her well-being.

That little bit of truth touched her somewhere deep inside, a cold little nugget so deep she hadn't
realized it was ever there, but now it blazed hot like the sun, warm within her. The Queen smiled and nuzzled into her sleeping Sheriff's neck and breathed her in. Her entirety burned and she closed her eyes once again to settle into comfortable bliss enjoying the feel of the blonde beneath her while it lasted.

Xena nudged a sleeping Gabrielle awake with an almost inaudible, "Trouble," then got up as though she were spring activated, chakram and sword each in hand and ready to go. Gabrielle rolled over, grabbed her staff, and rolled to her feet in one fluid movement.

"Guys!" Gabrielle said much louder than Xena's trouble alarm and the two foreigners sat straight up. Regina pulled down her shift to cover her exposed areas, not out of shame, but instinct. Neither woman had time to think about what position either of them was, or was not, just in.

Sounds of scuffling, Xena's high pitched war cry, and clanging metal echoed in the morning air.

Emma was dumbfounded in her sleepy haze as she watched her idol do her battle cry, then her attention was drawn to the enormous leather-clad men charging their camp. She quickly grabbed Regina who looked as though she were also in a state of shock and ran over to where their clothes hung; she pulled out her gun, pushed her queen behind her and pointed it at one of the men running straight toward them.

Without hesitation, Emma shot, winging the man in the thigh. The booming sound echoed in the sudden silence of the world as every person previously in one state of battle or another had now all dead stopped and or was cowering. The man Emma grazed was shouting about how she bit him. With his thigh ripped open and bleeding, only one of his buddies helped him limp away; the rest of the men ran for their lives.

Gabrielle was the first to speak, her eyes wide with curious astonishment. "What is that?"

"A gun," Emma answered then turned to Regina, whom she could feel shaking against her back and asked, "Are you okay?" She put her arms around her queen and hugged her tight.

Regina regained her regal composure, and very steadily replied, "Yes. Thank you." She called over to the two warriors, "All of you."

Still wide-eyed with wonder, Gabrielle purred, "A guuuuuun.' She stepped closer to get a look at the strange shiny metal object in Emma's hand. Emma gave a rather simplistic explanation of how the device worked, using things like black powder and arrowhead to describe the functionality of it.

"You could have killed him," Xena said astonished the man survived whatever strange weapon the strangers possessed.

"I know," Emma replied, replacing the gun in the holster, just thankful that it dried out enough to shoot.

"He wouldn't have hesitated to kill you," Xena said glancing at the smaller brunette who was now wrapping her arms around the Sheriff and added, "or her." The raven-haired warrior silently added, or worse.

"I'm the Savior. I don't kill people. I stopped him. He didn't need to lose his life," Emma explained as she absently wrapped a protective arm around the brunette to her side and noted the skeptical look in the warrior woman's eyes.

"How about some breakfast!" Gabrielle exclaimed breaking the sudden tension. "What?" she asked
when even the warrior princess cracked a smile. "Thug-thumping riles up the beast. The beast needs to be fed," she joined them in the hearty laugh at her expense then pushed Xena towards the lake. "Fish woman! FISH!"
Chapter 4

After breakfast, Emma and Regina were able to return the sleep shirts and get back into their own, now relatively dry, clothing. As they packed up their campsite Emma asked, "So, how far are we from this temple?"

The bard replied, "Oh, only a quarter lunar cycle."

Emma thought about the words she was saying, then gasped, "A week? There isn't a closer temple? Or... or something?" The blonde had dreams about a black nothing ripping apart the fabric of time. "We need to get home sooner." Her green eyes looked to worried brown and then to cool blue.

"Impossible, if you want her help, she'll only answer in her temple," Xena informed.

Regina seeing the certainty of Xena's look she put her hand on the blonde's shoulder, "Henry is safe, Emma. He's with the twidiots. They've noticed you're gone, and are probably all over it."

Emma rolled her eyes knowing the Queen was right and apologized to the set of warriors helping them. She'd been on an emotional rollercoaster so far and was feeling every emotionally raw. The lack of sound sleep the previous night did little to help.

They looted the few dead bodies Xena cut down during the raid and Emma took a ridiculously heavy sword from the ground nearby and slid it into a fur-covered scabbard and then shrugged it, and the barely more than a hunk of metal, over her shoulder. When Argo was tended to, fires were doused, and beds rolled up, they were on the road.

Several hours into their trip, Regina was pulling up the rear of their little caravan, carefully stepping over the deep ruts in what would barely be passable for a path, let alone a road.

"Let's go, your Majesty!" Xena called back and kicked Argo into a faster jaunt. Laughing back at the groans from her entourage she encouraged, "It's barely mid-day; if we keep this pace, it will take half a lunar cycle to get to the Amazons. Then what?"

Gabrielle put a warm palm on her lover's thigh with one word, "Xena."

"Fine," Xena said, "I'll go scout ahead, your Highnesses and assorted law keepers can catch your breath." With fire in her eyes and wind at her back, she was off, screeching her battle cry as she went.

Emma's mouth was agape as she watched her childhood heroine ride off into the horizon. "I can't believe that's Xena."

Gabrielle moved around Regina, who has taken her time stepping off the road, and pointed, "The stream bends back towards the road here; let's go check that out. It's safer than on the road and we can fill the water skins."

Regina leaned against a large rock and pulled her boots off. She rubbed her ankles down to her feet and toes, willing the charlie horse in the arch of her foot away.

Gabrielle looked on with curious astonishment at the heels of said boots. "Your world must be..." She paused, searching for a diplomatic word. "Interesting," she finished. The small brunette smiled evenly, "It certainly is different."
Gabrielle romanticized the idea of the strange world, its inhabitants, and excitement. By the story she was told the previous night, it certainly sounded thrilling. As exciting as things are in this world, there's something to be said about being a part of something so magical. She looked back toward the road, and considered; they have Amazon's, kings, gods, and wannabe thugs, which made for many of an adventure for her and her warrior. The creative bones in the bard's body dared to imagine just how different Emma and Regina's world could be.

Could she and her warrior settle down, have a home? Have a family? A sad smile formed at that thought. Whatever would Xena do? She would be so restless in the mundane. However, by the looks of their guests, perhaps this other world would have its adventures. Where they could have the home, the family, and still have the excitement of the unknown.

*The danger.*

She admitted to herself that was exactly what drew her to this life. She loved the constant testing of her mortal boundaries. Knowing that no matter the situation, Xena would get them out of any real danger. Her faith in her warrior never wavered. However, a world where Xena's past didn't rear its head every day. Now that... was something to think about. It would give the warrior the peace she'll never know here.

Snapping out of her little daydream she heard the tail end of her companion's conversation, "...well I wasn't planning on dropping off the face of the earth, Emma. They are comfortable shoes!"

The Sheriff, looking doubtful, snarked, "Yeah? Trekking in those things feels good, does it?" A cool silent stare answered her question. She added, "For the next week?"

Regina looked down, envying her friend's sensible sneakers, then returned her dark gaze back to green eyes and leered. Satisfied Emma felt the Queen's wrath sufficiently, she turned away and sniped, "I LIKE my heels, Emma; they are elegant and sophisticated, just as a Queen should be!"

Emma scoffed at the statement and went to refute, but Gabrielle piped up first, feeling uncomfortable with the bickering. "Okay. Well, we can find you something a little more..." she paused, cautiously searching for the right word.


*PRACTICAL. That's it.*

"Practical, for this world's more... strenuous activities."

Despite Gabrielle's struggle with diplomacy, Regina stiffened up and prepared to lay into the insolent little blonde when Emma, recognizing the Queen rearing her evil head, interjected tenderly. "She has a point, Regina. Let's get you something that will make this whole trip easier on you." Seeing the Queen deflate, Emma continued and squinted at the brunette who was still shooting daggers at Gabrielle. "If we come across more thugs, I would be worried about you, Madam Mayor, and I'm still just learning how to use one of these," she said, patting her new-found weapon. "I need my full concentration if I am to protect Henry's mom."

Dark eyes calmed at the mention of their son and the queen relented, "Perhaps." Emma relaxed having known she had maneuvered her friend from a potential temper tantrum.

Xena silently walked up to the group of women, noting the tension in her weary bard. None of the women had noticed her and the enormous horse return, so she cleared her throat, which startled only Regina. Glancing at the shoeless Queen, Xena suggested, "There is a town a few
hours walk from here; I know a guy who owes me. He is a cobbler, amongst other things."

Gabrielle smiled knowingly and hissed, "San Lucas?"

Xena winked and continued, "Regina," a wicked smile flashed so quickly only her bard noticed, "and Emma - hop up on Argo. We need to keep moving if we want to make it before the sun sets."

The bard smiled cheerfully, "Woo, the Inn! Xena, please!?"

A wide smile from the warrior flashed, and she drewled, "Yes, Your Highness." Trim, sculpted arms wrapped around her neck in a grateful hug. Xena looked over at Emma's deer in headlights look, and a wide evil grin spread across the warrior's face.

Regina was the first to say, "Thank you! I really shouldn't," poorly feigning reluctance for the welcomed break to her sore ankles. She climbed up onto the warhorse first. Xena let down her bard and snapped her fingers at Emma, "Hey, take up coach," and motioned to the rear of the saddle, behind Regina.

The blonde instinctively grabbed Regina's hips to steady herself as the horse began to move forward. "Bad time to say I don't like heights?" she called to the warriors.

Gabrielle smirked, "Tell me about it."

The Queen gave a pat to Emma's jean-covered thigh and soothed, "Don't worry Miss Swan, horse riding is what I do. Now, hang on." She looked down curiously at the warrior, who was smirking at them. "Tighter," she added. Strong arms wrapped around her sheer blouse and they started back toward the road.

*Bad Warrior, the look from her queen said it all.*

*What? A shoulder shrug with pure innocence imagined.*

*You know what. Strawberry eyebrows furrowed.*

*Okay Fine. With an upturned eyebrow, the warrior went to give Emma an out, only to feel the bard's light touch on her arm before she could even open her mouth.*

*Okay, wait. Green eyes twinkled with more than a hint of devious.*

*God, I love that look, Xena thought with a smile.*

*A little nudge won't hurt. Gabrielle threw a thoughtful eyebrow wag.*

*Bad bard! A wide toothy grin silently answered.*

The crew reached the outskirts of a town, just like any other of a half dozen scattered through the valley. Farmland edged its borders and people worked the land, sharing the bounty, trading it for things they couldn't harvest themselves. Regina looked ever so regal; even stripped of makeup and relatively ungroomed, she carried herself like a queen and her queenliness exuded from every pore. Emma held herself together as she gripped the woman in front of her.

The bard was happily working out a new ending to a story she had told hundreds of times before. "It needs a little something. I just… can't…" she said squinting her eyes and finished, "get it."

"You will," her warrior encouraged.
"Thanks. I know, it's just... wait..." She looked far off into space, not seeing the road around them or her companions; she saw the dragon barreling down upon his prey, sun glinting off of silver armor, fire bursting from puffed up lungs leveling the battlefield of thousands of men in an instant! "That's IT!" the bard exclaimed and clapped her hands. She turned to Argo, reaching into her saddlebag, and pulled out her bard-kit, which consisted of a scroll and a piece of charred coal then rushed over to a nearby tree and plopped down.

"What is she doing?" Regina blurted out. Xena waved her hand at the question and answered, "She'll catch up."

They rolled through the center of town, if a town is what you could call it.

*More like a glorified campsite*, the queen inside Regina frowned. For the thousandth time, the warm body behind her adjusted and she leaned back to get comfortable again. She had been able to feel Emma's uneven breath on the back of her neck, her hands frozen around her midsection pressing her blouse into her abdomen; they hadn't moved all afternoon.

They had a strange relationship, the queen contemplated. All of her relationships have always been out of the norm, less for perhaps Daniel. When she first met the blonde she never imagined being friendly towards her, let alone friends, but here she is - probably her closest friend. She admired the blonde. Emma wasn't afraid of her, and she'd seen the depths of the Queen's depravity up close and personal. She never cowers from the darkness, but simply led the Queen to the light.

She encouraged the Mayor and had become her personal moral guide. Whenever the brunette starts to slip back into the darkness, Emma is there holding out her hand, pulling her back from the brink. The Savior has the queen's best interest at heart. She could trust it. She always did what was right, even to a fault.

The memories of Marian surfaced briefly. He was to blame for leaving, not Emma for saving the woman's life. The funny thing was, she was almost grateful to the woman for rescuing her. Of course, it hurt when he left, but it would have eventually been something; better it happened sooner rather than later. It was the way her life was and always had been.

*With the darkness in this heart, who could love her...?*

*Henry.*

*Ran off to Boston in search of another mother.*

*But he came back.*

*Because Miss Swan brought him back.*

Her heart hurt so much when he brought this woman into her town. Now though... She turned in the saddle and gave a quick glance at the blonde; now she couldn't imagine her life without her. The sheriff's eyes were squeezed shut, her entire body tense and starting to shake with strain. "I had no idea you were this afraid of heights, Emma." She rested her hand across Emma's and gave her a pat.

"Yeah you know, it's a little more than how high this thing is; it's that it's moving. You know? On its own."

Regina chuckled, "I am controlling her; it's practically like a car."

Emma relaxed a little, melting into the back of the Queen, her lips at her ear she replied, "My car
won't spontaneously kick out its rear axle and throw me out of it."

The Mayor threw her head back on Emma's shoulder and laughed out loud, all the while she continually rubbed the frightened girl's hands. "With the state of your bug, I'm not entirely convinced! Besides, this is Xena's warhorse. She is well trained, Emma; you couldn't be safer." Pale arms tightened around the brunette's waist, and Emma whispered, "I know."
Chapter 5

The Savior dismounted Argo without grace and Regina looked relieved when Xena caught the blonde before she landed on her ass. The warrior held her hand out for Regina to assist but the Queen's face scrunched up and exclaimed, "I am not putting my feet down in that, muck."

With a quick, forced smile and then an eye roll Xena quipped, "As you please." The warrior grabbed Emma by the upper arm and escorted her into the pub.

"I probably shouldn't leave her out there."

"She'll get over it," Xena smirked.

"She may, but she may burn down half your world before she does."

Xena turned and looked into surprised green eyes. "I mean, not really… I don't know why I said that," Emma backtracked.

A bright devious grin crossed Xena's dark features, and she chuckled at the blonde knowingly.

"I'll go see if I can coax her off the horse. I mean, Argo."

"Good luck," the warrior offered with a devious smirk.

_Oh, Gabrielle, you think I'm a bad Warrior now…_

Her smirk did not fade as she approached the innkeeper and called, "Two of your finest rooms keep!" She dropped her purse down on the bar with a thud. The small balding man behind the counter scoffed. "You know your money's no good here!" He snickered in that weasley way he has.

"Alright, two single bedrooms Jess! Oh boy, I have insider knowledge that my dear Gabrielle, everyone's favorite bard, has just completed a new masterpiece," she talked up her lover. "An oldie but a goody, with a twist at the end. You are going to LOVE it!" She saw the dinar signs in his eyes at the mention of the bard, and knew she had him. "You just need to do me one favor."

She smiled wickedly, and his sweat ran cold when he stuttered, "An-An-Anything fu-for you Xena, you know that."

"Good," she replied and filled him in on his part in her play.

Regina sat atop the steed, arms folded, looking gruff as people wheeling carts or dragging goats walked by unabashedly gawking at her. She curled her lips and snarled at a few of them making them cower. She rolled her eyes when she realized she doesn't get enjoyment from that anymore.

She saw Emma exit the Inn and turned her head up and away as if she hadn't. She wasn't entirely pleased she was left alone and felt the need to express that displeasure toward her blonde counterpart. She didn't feel unsafe; there's a terrific chance the little village was well acquainted with the warrior princess if the way they looked at the mare was any indication.

Emma rounded the blonde beast with a look of determination. "We need to get you some shoes Regina, and they'll need to measure your feet. I'm guessing they don't carry standard size six anywhere here."
"My shoe size is an eight, Miss Swan."

"I wouldn't know the first thing about how to explain that to this guy. So I need... your feet." She watched as Regina looked around Argo's hooves and saw the woman's comfort zone pushed. She removed the heel of her sneaker from one of her feet then unlaced and strapped the shoe onto the Queen's nyloned foot. "They're a seven and a half, but I think you can manage." She circled to the other side of Argo and put her other shoe on the Queen. Still holding onto her calf she looked up at her and said, "See? Problem solved. Let's go get you some boots."

Regina swung her leg over Argo's head, putting her hands on Emma's shoulders and slipped down off the horse right into the woman's chivalrous arms. "Thank you, M'Lady," Regina smiled genuinely.

"Think nothing of it," Emma replied with a crooked smile.

Regina flinched when the blonde quickly removed her hands from around her waist and stepped back from the embrace, directly into an ankle-deep mud puddle.

"Oh please be mud," Emma gasped. Regina covered her mouth, but a laugh escaped before she could grab it.

To add insult to injury, Xena walked around Argo to catch Emma leaping out of a puddle in nothing but stocking feet. Wide blue eyes met wide green, and Xena exclaimed, "Where is your footwear now?"

"Fine let's go find San Lucas before he goes home for the night." The brunette raised her hand sheepishly, and Xena looked down noting the oddly colored foot coverings were now on the smaller woman. Raising her eyebrows and shaking her head at Emma, Xena said, "Gabby!" he came around the bar for an embrace. "Our favorite bard!" He said much louder than normal for his patron's benefit. "How are you!??" he asked as he kissed either cheek during the quick embrace.

"You find me well, Jessup," she said smiling at him as he looked around to make sure people were seeing them together. "Xena was just here, she said you had something extraordinary planned for us tonight," he continued his advertisement to the crowd of 7 or so patrons who turned to see what the commotion was about.

"Did she?" The bard said through her clenched teeth and plastered smile. "Yes well, maybe one or two stories tonight, Jessup."

Upon confirmation, he turned to the inn's dining room and called out, "Gabrielle of Potidea will be at Jessup's exclusively! One night only! Tell your friends!" He patted Gabrielle's shoulder and guided her back over to his business counter, his face suddenly solemn. "So what brings you two to town? It isn't," his gulp was audible before continuing, "trouble, is it Gabrielle?"

She quickly warmed her smile and raised her hand to comfort the man, "No no Jess, nothing like that. We are just passing through with a couple of..." she thought for a moment, pausing and
continued with, "friends."

"Ah yes," he continued with a wink, "Your friends." He quoted with his fingers.

Completely perplexed by his odd behavior she nodded, "Yes, traveling companions. We are helping them to the Amazon Nation."

He looked properly interested and leaned in commented, "That sounds like it would make a great story."

Gabrielle smiled again, "Yeah, I'm sure it would," she trailed off, "but uh, did Xena...?"

He put his hand up interrupting the bard and handed her the keys to both rooms reserved by the warrior.

"Did she pay...?"

"Pishaahh," Jessup laughed. "You two saved this town. You won't ever need for a roof over your head my dear girl."

She chuckled, bid farewell to the innkeeper, and made her way upstairs to their rooms. Mentally claiming the one with the best strategic vantage point then opened the other door and peeked her head inside, scanning the modest room making sure everything was in order for their new friends. Confirming her bad warrior suspicions, she locked the room up tight. Turning to her room, she opened and entered it quietly. She laid down her satchel on the small desk under the large window overlooking the square and inhaled deeply. With a huff, she fell back to the bed and considered how long she should allow her bad warrior to play with the strangers. Her brat tendencies were part of the warrior's lure, but she wasn't entirely certain as to what to make of the women just yet.

Emma seemed to her a mystery inside of an enigma inside of a labyrinth. She saw in the woman strength, but her insecurity was palpable; it was a mixture the Amazon Queen could recognize but not entirely identify. There was a fire within her that made the bard cautious, but also an innate goodness that was distinct. The woman's unsteadiness all but went away when she maneuvered her small queen, and Gabrielle surmised the depths of Emma's feeling for Regina was virtually boundless.

Regina was an entirely different story, not even of the same realm. The real woman hid behind layers of masks and Gabrielle was certain it would be some time, if ever before she would see the woman's true self. She was broken and had a heaviness to her that reminded her of Xena; the malicious burden of evil. It took Gabrielle cycles to peel away the warrior princess's defenses, and by the looks of Emma and Regina's interactions, the Sheriff was well on her way.

Emma held aside a fabric curtain and ushered Regina into the cobbler's establishment behind the warrior princess. She watched familiar greetings between the warrior and the very large man behind the workbench. The man stood a head taller than the warrior princess, and Emma surmised that perhaps he wasn't entirely humanoid. The length of his forearms were obscene, and his deep baritone reminded Emma of Lurch from the Munsters. She shot a look to the brunette who just lifted her eyebrows and gave a shrug.

Gabrielle scooched passed the stunned Sheriff and heartedly greeted the man. As their new friends caught up, Emma looked around the showroom a little. There were tables set up, and like-items were piled with like-items. Clothing, including but not limited to armaments, even piles of metallic jewelry. Decorative shields lined the walls, and Emma picked up a mace with worry. It was heavy,
and she imagined the damage the blunted spikes could inflict on skin and bone, and she shuttered. She returned to Regina's side when she saw the leathersmith kneel at the Mayor's feet.

"May I?" He held out his hand, and the brunette nodded. On his knees, he was almost the same height as her standing her full height. He lifted the woman's calf and removed the strange foot wrap, looking at it intricately then up at Xena who shrugged.

Setting down the shoe, he pulled the band of leather from around his neck holding the warm end to the back of Regina's heel. He circled it around to the top of her foot then measured to the ball, and then the ankle. He stood, towering over both women and went back to his workbench and wrote something on the back of a leather piece. He returned to Xena and shook her hand, covering it entirely with his other hand. "Tomorrow my friend."

Xena took out her purse to pay the man, and Emma stepped forward. "Um… I'd like to… Uh… How much will this cost?"

Xena smiled and said, "It's okay Emma. The good Amazonian Bard over here will be working tonight, that will surely cover it."

Emma removed the gold bracelet from around her wrist. "I'd like to, um, would this cover it?" She asked holding up the gold chain for their inspection.

San Lucas eyed Xena who put her hands up in surrender and then he walked over to the thin blonde making the offer. He looked at the piece with scrutiny then said, "This has amazing detail, it is quite breathtaking. It would more than cover the cost of a single pair of shoes."

"You could outfit you both with this." He smiled seeing the devilish look on Gabrielle's face with this statement.

A warm hand grasped Emma's forearm, "Didn't Hook give you that? Emma I can't let you… it is too much… I have…" A hand patted the grasp, and sad green eyes looked up. "We weren't mentioning his name," she simply said, argument thwarted. "We are going to see Amazons. Might as well look the part."

It was dark by the time they made it back to the inn. Gabrielle handed a roughly cut key to Emma and said "Yours is on the end to the left. There is a bath in the room." Looking down at the Sheriff's mud-oh-god-please-be-just-mud encrusted feet. "Then get dressed, I've left sleeping garments in your room for you, for later, but try on your new stuff and come down for the show."

She looked back at her smirking warrior, "Apparently, I am performing tonight."

The two trudged upstairs leaving the pair at the bar. Xena already ordered a couple of ales and had a sud-stache. Gabrielle giggled and wiped it off her lover's upper lip. "I saw what you did you sneak."

Xena licked the suds from the tip of her bard's fingers making their owner swoon a bit. "You know me. I'm nudging."

"Okay, but Her Majesty has quite the temper," the bard answered with a smile.

"Oh, I noticed," Xena said with hooded eyes, she let go of the bard's trapped hand and pulled her into a fiery kiss they both felt in their toes. Gabrielle quickly separated, "I noticed, you noticing."

A feigned innocence was quickly covered with a nose crinkle and a smile. "Doesn't matter where I get my appetite, as long as I eat at home, right?" The blonde threw a skeptical gaze through slitted
eyes. Xena grabbed Gabrielle around her biceps pulling her up and into a passionate kiss. Her mouth gave way to an incessant tongue, probing, searching. Holding Gabrielle's bottom lip between her teeth as she gradually broke the embrace, then with a voice deep with desire she said, "We have a bath too right?" Gabrielle nodded dreamily as her brain could no longer make words. Xena lifted her Queen cradling her in her strong arms and headed upstairs.
Emma unlocked their door, stopping dead in the doorway as the scene within the room came into view. A small impatient nudge from behind her snapped her out of her daze, and she entered the candlelit room.

The queen looked around and cooed at the quaintness of it. "Oh Emma, it's adorable. So romantic with all the candles and incense. I forget how much I love candlelight. It makes everything seem so much warmer. Don't you think?"

Emma swallowed, eyes wide, unable to pull her gaze from her focus.

The single bed.

She closed her eyes, considered her options then said, "I can go ask… I mean… I'm sure you want your own… uh… you know…"

Regina looked to where the blonde was nodding and realized their dilemma. It was small, yes but also gave the opportunity to sleep within the comfort of the savior, so the Queen wasn't entirely dissatisfied by the size, unlike the Sheriff. "Well, yes but I am sure a place like this has limited accommodations. Far be it for me to demand anything from our gracious hosts. Besides, it looks plenty big, practically a full."

She thought back to how she'd woken up that morning and noted Emma's discomfort with the intimacy. They were just friends, after all.

"Let's get you washed up," she noticed Emma still staring at the bed, then added with irritation, "At least it isn't the ground again."

Emma's eyes were still wide, but her brow was losing its intense furrow. "A bath sounds awesome," she replied, putting the uncomfortable issues she had about their sleeping arrangements out of her mind.

Emma put the paper-wrapped purchases on the wooden desk and lifted the candlestick holder with intense and steady focus and followed her friend across the small room.

Regina pushed through the curtain that divided the room from the bathing area and held it open for Emma's careful steps. The room lit up as she pushed further in then got brighter when Regina lit more of the room's candles. She held a thin stick over a flame then tossed it into the fireplace. The dry wood caught and the fire roared into life providing the room with not only heat but also a larger source of light.

Hammered steel cauldrons lined the plain stone top of the mantle and several grooves were cut in along the inner edge of the fireplace. Emma saw a bucket pulley system, just outside one of the windows, that grabbed water from somewhere below and pulled it up to the room. Regina, familiar with the technology, started filling the cauldrons with buckets of water, settling them into their placeholders near the fire. "It will take a bit of time to get it warm," she started, "but only about twice as long as a cup of tea would take."

Emma shivered as she watched the Queen work and mumbled, "Tea would be awesome."

Regina filled the bathing basin up to the fill line with the cold water and hinted, "You could go see if the girls have any on them, I'd love a cup." She smirked when Emma nodded and turned to go
fill the request. "Thank you dear!" she called after the blonde who hurried out of the close quarters of the bathroom.

A small knock at the door sounded, and Xena lifted Gabrielle off of her lap and announced, "It's Emma." The bard groaned in displeasure which got a playful shush from Xena as she opened the door.

The disheveled blonde forced a smile through her worried haze and asked her question, "Hi. Um, she," thumbing back at their room, "Uh do you have anything that would pass for tea?" she closed her eyes and scrunched her nose when the sound of the insult hit her ears.

*I've been around the Mayor's sass too long.*

"Sorry, I mean, you wouldn't happen to have tea, would you?" She smiled wearily at Xena's amused look. The warrior stepped aside to allow her filthy friend in. Emma waived at Gabrielle who was walking towards her scroll kit making it seem as though she were working. "The water is heating up and uh… R'gina… uh mentioned she wanted tea, so..."

"So you jumped on the please-your-queen bandwagon?" Gabrielle said and tried to stifle a smile. Xena didn't bother with the stifle and said, "Hey I know that wagon, I'm a frequent rider!"

The bard's eyes narrowed in mock annoyance at the laughing warrior and Xena handed Emma a pouch with a word of caution, "This stuff can be a little strong so put a comb of honey in the bottom of the mug. That will sweeten it right up for Her Majesty." She gestured with a glance toward her own Queen which made Emma relax with a chuckle.

"The room okay?" Xena asked. The bard who was pretending to study scribbles on parchment lost her composure and laughed out loud. She pointed at the scroll. "I really am a comic genius," she muttered, successfully covering her knowledge of her mate's devious plan to set the mood of their companion's room.

Emma lifted her head in polite agreement of the bard's statement, "It is uh, cozy." She looked behind Xena and saw the couple's own single bed and decided against asking them if the inn had doubles.

Xena saw the question fade from the blonde's eyes and decided to help her along a bit, "We were lucky to get two rooms, looks like the inn filled up when news got around about my bard over here." Nodding back at Gabrielle she added with beaming genuine pride, "She is a house favorite."

Emma smiled warmly and added, "Oh I bet. The battling bard."

Xena turned to her lover, "You know I like that Gab, you should start signing your work with that." That got a laugh from both blondes, then Emma looked down again searching the floorboards for how to verbalize her appreciation. "Um…" she started then mentally chastised herself for starting everything she said with um. "We uh, really truly appreciate your help. I know we are strangers, strange strangers at that, and I uh… yeah, just um, thanks." She cut the stammering off in favor of directness.

"You are welcome Emma of Storybrooke. Your bath is probably ready by now," the warrior nudged. "We'll meet you downstairs for dinner and a show." Taking the hint, the Sheriff short waived to Gabrielle and said a quick see you soon to Xena and returned to her room.

The fireplace in the main room was lit when she returned, with two steaming cups of water on the
desk. Emma strode over to the counter and dropped the cotton pouch into the closest mug then opened the jar the warrior gave her and dug out some of the honeycomb, melting a bit in each mug. When she switched the cotton bag to the other cup, she licked her fingers clean of the most amazing honey she had ever tasted. Before closing the lid, she dipped her finger in once more and hummed.

"Oh, tea? Fantastic," The deep voice behind her said. She turned around, finger still between her lips and replied, "Mmhmm."

"What do you have?" The Mayor asked. Emma removed her index finger part of the way from her lips and replied, "Honomey," her sweetened finger still in the way of her tongue.

Regina slid up next to her and dipped her own finger into the sticky amber, pulling out a neat little glob that covered the tip. Emma watched with sudden fevered awareness as that finger disappeared into a warm wanting mouth. The cutest little scar above her lip creased deeply as her lips wrapped around her single digit. Her eyes rolled back, and the most erotic moan ever to hit Emma's ears leaked out of the small woman.

"Amazing," Emma said absently.

"Oh yes," Regina replied with a smirk meeting Emma's gaze.

Emma shifted a little then remembered she was covered in… filth. "Is the bath good to go? We are going to have dinner with the girls before Gabby does her show."

A thumb motioned behind the brunette, and Emma got a blissful nod as the Queen removed her finger from her mouth. Emma dipped her finger into the honey once more before heading back towards the bathroom.

"Brat!" Regina scolded with a chuckle.

Emma pulled off her muck-encrusted jeans, and completely ruined socks, and set them in a separate pile from her leather jacket, panties, and holster vest. She was standing in just her undershirt staring at the steaming basin. She looked around and realized there was no sink or anything remotely close to a sink she could rinse off into before getting into the tub. She was thinking about how she should go about cleaning up when Regina entered the room, her queenly persona firmly on display.

The Mayor silently strutted to the fireplace and expertly removed one of the cauldrons, setting it down next to the stool in the corner. She then removed one of the cool water buckets, dumping most of the water into the bath but then filled the bucket with hot water. Emma watched her with curiosity, forgetting that she should be embarrassed by her own nudity, partial as it was.

Her hand was taken, and she was led to the stool and guided to sit, without a word.

Regina knelt before her and tried to roll up her way too narrow sleeves, without success. Her black eyes, much darker in nothing but the candlelight, met Emma's and her hands started to unbutton her blouse when permission was asked, "Do you mind?"

A silent nod granted that permission and Emma watched as red tipped fingers slowly unbuttoned the top button. She was helpless as she watched this insane tease get lower and lower, slowly revealing pale skin. The shirt was then opened and removed, revealing black lace that covered the red bra the Mayor was wearing. A cotton cloth was dipped into the warm bucket of water then squeezed gently. Regina proceeded to wash the blonde of what bled through her socks and jeans.
Regina pulled back after completing her task and began to speak, without making eye contact, "I wanted to thank you, Emma."

The blonde began to interrupt but was met with let-me-finish eyes and Emma closed her mouth promptly. "For putting up with me when I am impossible," the Mayor said quietly.

Emma's love softened her gaze, "You are never really impossible, R'gina. You're just, you. And I um..." with a shoulder shrug and a shy smile she admitted, "like... who you are."

There was a pregnant pause that ended with an inquiry, "Do you mind if I join you?"

Emma looked to the large round wooden barrel and nodded her head permission for the second time that evening.

The women turned from one another to remove the remainder of their clothing then settled into the steaming hot bath. Sighs of bliss filled the room, and Emma cried "Calgon, take me away!" They both laughed then chatted like they were back home, all the tension was gone, and it was just the two friends discussing their upcoming adventure.

Regina closed her eyes and was enjoying the decadence for a few moments longer when Emma got herself out of the tub. "Don't fall asleep in there, no one likes a pruney queen." A warm wet washcloth was lifted and draped over the face of the Queen. "Five more minutes," Regina mumbled into the warm cloth.

Emma went out into the living area and unwrapped her new outfit. Gabrielle chose a very authentic looking Amazon inspired outfit with beaded adornments. The lemon-colored cotton under-shirt burst through and complemented the deep coffee brown of the soft leather. The skirt was similar to Xena's, with thick layered strips of leather with decorative shapes cut from the centers to allow for the yellow to peek through.

She looked at herself in the reflection of the mirror and smoothed down the skirt. They ordered her boots as well, so since they were just going to be downstairs, and really had nothing else to put on, she decided to go barefoot. She stood on the balls of her feet noting the muscle in her legs contract, with a satisfied half smile. She pulled her hair back into a bun but left a few strands in front to frame her face.

*I could totally pass for an Amazon.*

A soft knock at the door brought her back down flat-foot. She cracked open the door to see Gabrielle cleaned, dressed and smiling. "Hi, may I... come in?"

Emma pulled the door wider to accommodate the little bard who noted the blonde's state of dress and exclaimed, "Oh great you are done."

Emma saw the green eyes scan the room and explained, "She is taking an extra few moments in the bath."

"Oh well, that's fine, um... Xena..." she started, "Is waiting for you downstairs."

The tone of the bard stopped Emma in her tracks, and with a silent upturn of a strawberry blonde brow, Emma closed her mouth and swallowed her objection. When the Sheriff didn't move a muscle, the bard said with a commanding tone, "Best not keep the warrior princess waiting."

Satisfied when the lithe blonde started to obey, she praised the girl and shut the door behind her.
Regina entered the main living area with her hair twisted up in a towel, already dressed in the blood red crushed velvet undergarment of her new outfit. "Emma?" She looked up and was surprised to see the bard instead of the Sheriff in the living area of the room. The warrior approached the Queen, hand extended with a flat white object.

Regina looked at it with question, and the bard answered, "It's a peace offering. My comb." She pulled a little at the back of her short hair, "I don't really have much use for it anymore, and I thought you would appreciate the comfort."

Regina looked puzzled at the gift, but then said her thanks and questioned about the Sheriff's absence.

"She was dressed so I said I would wait with you and she could go down and meet up with Xena," Gabrielle said with a warm smile.

Regina started to tell the woman she didn't need company but Gabrielle was insistent. The certainty of will the Amazon Queen could impose startled Regina, and the Mayor conceded and got dressed. Gabrielle assisted with the straps and laces to get Regina into the elaborate leather outfit and tied up the back of her top.

The black of the leather complemented where the red undershirt showed through. Thinly braided strips made up the skirt that covered her to mid-thigh. The red velvet shorts folded over the top inch of the skirt, creating a dramatic red stripe across the top of the black leather.

"That looks amazing on you," Gabrielle whispered. The Queen stood in front of her reflection and admired her well-toned figure. Her hand touched her mid-section, and she took a breath in and released it. "Well, black is my color. I do look good, don't I?" she asked honestly.

Gabrielle laughed, "Oh yeah."

A smile drew across the brunette's face, and she turned to face the bard. "May I?" Regina asked reaching for the comb.

"Of course..

Regina pulled through snarly, very unhappy hair.

_I wonder if the bard has conditioner in her little sack?

She detangled and swept her dark hair back away from her face and when she was finished, Gabrielle came up behind her and looked past Regina's shoulder at their reflection in the mirror. Her eyes showed kindness towards the brunette that Regina has rarely seen, the power of it forced her to look away.

The bard sought permission before touching her, then pulled up the brunette's locks. Her small, but powerful hands expertly weaved strands together gently tugging them into place. She finished each braid with soft thin leather that bound around the bottom holding it securely. She then stepped away when she was done, circling the Mayor, lifted her chin and fixed the problem areas. "There," she said contently. "Now you truly look the part, Your Majesty."

Regina turned back to the mirror and looked at herself, her brow creased in wonder, she did look the part alright. "Thank you, Gabrielle." The gratitude was sincere and moved her to speechlessness.
Gabrielle, who had been tiptoeing around her real reason for coming to the room finally gathered up her courage and started. "So..." she eased into it, "About this afternoon, I wasn't judging you... I feel as though we've gotten off on the wrong foot, and I'm sorry..."

"Please, don't," the Queen put up her hand to stop the bard. "Look, I realize that I can be, difficult. You are helping us out of the goodness of who you two are. I sometimes regress back into the queen I used to be, so it should be me who apologizes to you, Gabrielle. I wish I could promise it won't happen again," she looked down. "But I can't." She added sadly, "I don't know how Emma puts up with me sometimes."

Gabrielle turned away from the brunette to sit on the bed, mostly to hide the smile at the mention of Emma's name.

*Thank you, Your Highness, for the segue.*

Gabrielle probed, "Emma is a close friend then?"

"Honestly, the closest I have ever had," Regina replied with a shy smile.

"Are you, and she..." she paused looking for the most delicate way to put it, "A couple?"

She knew the answer but was trying to help Xena with her little game. The strangers were clearly attracted to one another, albeit thick in comprehension.

"What?" The dark eyes of the Evil Queen whipped around to a startled bard, "Why?"

Gabrielle broke eye contact by turning around, she felt very exposed by the change in the woman's demeanor and needed a moment to compose herself. Cursing Xena for putting her up to this, she put on a very casual, "Oh well, I mean if you aren't... Then Emma is single then?"

"Emma is," the Queen slipped on her diplomatic mayoral shoes for a moment, "not seeing anyone," she said carefully, then added, "That being said, I think her tastes are more pirate flavored."

Gabby smiled and mumbled under her breath, "I wouldn't be so sure of that Your Majesty."

"I'm sorry, dear, did you say something?"

Gabrielle sweetened her grin, "Alright," she paused and secretly apologized to Eponin for the next outlandish tale she was about to weave. "I have a friend in the village we are going to, Eponin."

She continued, "Beautiful girl. A little shy, but Emma is just her type. I just thought I'd ask you," she paused then laid it on thick, "since you two are so close and all... what her situation was. Not that you plan on staying around or anything, but..." her lips curled at her own cheekiness, "We Amazons are known for our casual views on sex." She turned back around having studied everything she could on the far side of the room, "I love playing matchmaker, but wanted to make sure I wasn't going to cause complications for you, in case there was anything romantic between you."

"No, no, nothing like that." The mayor pulled a wide tight smile and a light pink blush at the consideration, but no she firmly stated, "Our relationship is..." she said searching for the right adjective.

"Complicated?"

"Yes!" the brunette exclaimed, "Exactly." She added without divulging any more information then she needed to.
"Oh good," the blonde said offhandedly. Regina opened her mouth to voice her opinion on the bard's matchmaking scheme, but Gabrielle smiled and said, "Are you ready to go get some food? I'm ravenous!"

Emma felt exposed when she reached the entryway to the dining area. The place was packed, Xena however, towered over most of the patrons and was easy to pick out. She walked through the crowd, over to the bar and took the hand that was extended to her instinctively. Xena gave her a twirl and whistled, "Hey hot stuff, want a drink to cool down?"

Emma laughed but blushed anyway. She nodded her head then took the drink the barkeep set down in front of her and took a deep gulp. It tasted like a thick Guinness and she choked a little when she swallowed.

"Take it easy, this is Jess's special brew."

"It's like thin gravy."

The warrior princess laughed heartily and replied, "Yeah but it gets the job done!"

A rough looking figure at the end of the counter was admiring the warrior princess' prize. A blonde Amazon. He figured she must be the infamous bard that he had heard so much about.

I'd take my time with that one.

He held passion for two things, pain and battle. If he wasn't doing one, he wanted to do the other. He's been brooding off in the shadows for the better part of a candle mark watching the warrior. He envied her. Her power, her success, her… love interest. He knew damn well he couldn't have the bard if Xena were around. He wanted the bard, more so now than when he first devised this plan, and by the looks of them, Xena would always be around, time to change things up a little.
Chapter 7

Xena put her arm around her and pulled her in close and whispered into her ear, "Don't pull away, I am claiming you, so no one gets any ideas about harassing you." Blue intensity scanned the room, but only one figure was exuding danger to the warrior. She purposefully didn't call attention to the fact that she was taking in the man's shadowy attributes but chose to let him think he was still anonymous. The firm grip she had on the sheriff's hip gave a squeeze to drive home the point to any onlookers, and poignantly him.

Then she asked, in not the whisper that had just tickled the sheriff's earlobe, but in a hushed tone nonetheless, "Would you like ale or ale?" A nodded answer got her a slap on the rear as Xena held up two fingers to the little balding man behind the counter who nodded and prepared their drinks.

Another breathy whisper lit a fire in the sheriff, "Jessup's can get a little crazy. Just stay close to me, and you will be fine." She stared back at the warrior and realized the woman was battle ready and completely armed, her eyes then darted around the place seeing the rough look of the patrons around her, and was glad for Xena's presence. They seemed to keep a safe distance from the warrior, and by association, herself. She stood on the balls of her feet to whisper to the warrior, "Thank you. For everything." She then put her arm around the woman who protected her as if they had been old friends.

Milky skin blushed crimson as the warrior whispered into the bard's ear. Her blonde hair pulled back tight away from her face showing her genuine smile as the dark woman held her tight.

Yes, I need to get the warrior out of the way.

He wasn't stupid enough to think he could kill the tall woman, and for what he wanted, his ultimate revenge, he honestly didn't want to. He just needed her indisposed... and unable to assist as he swooped in and took his prize. He wanted to hurt the blonde, for no other reason than she was Xena's, and hurt her he shall.

His mood lightened, and his pants tightened as his thoughts of making the blonde scream echoed through his head. Her fear filled his mind almost coming to life as he stared at her from across the room. He stood slowly, dug out two dinars for his ale and quietly left the inn.

There was much to do, and now he had his intended target, time to put the careful plan in motion. Where others failed, he would succeed in getting his revenge. Unlike the undisciplined riff-ruff, he knew the warrior princess. Knew what she was capable of. Oh yes, he will have his prize, and she will never be the same after he is through playing with her.

Regina led Gabrielle downstairs to the main area of the inn, the Warrior Princess stuck out like a sore thumb and had Emma in an embrace; the two women were smiling and talking very closely. Regina's entire body stiffened and was set ablaze with unbridled jealousy. The dark warrior's hand slid down over the swell of the savior's ass and gripped her and Regina reigned in her instinct to run over to the pair and rip Emma from Xena's grasp. She watched as Emma reached up and embraced the warrior, pressing her body up against the woman and with a wide smile said something into the warrior's ear and the grip around Emma tightened.

Gabrielle saw the change in the queen when eyes caught the scene of her bad warrior. "Let's find a seat," she said into Regina's ear.
"Yes, let's," the queen hissed coolly.

A wave from the bard made the warrior nod in recognition. Regina brooded as she absently followed Gabrielle who led her to a dimly lit corner table, backed up to the wall. It was raised on its own platform giving the perfect vantage to the entire room. This was Xena's table, everyone knew it, and so it was vacant in the crowded room.

Regina sat facing away from the crowd, Gabrielle slid into the booth on the other side. Xena and Emma joined them shortly after they got situated, both holding an extra mug for the women.

Emma noticed the stiffness of her queen as they approached; with Regina's back to the wall, arms folded in a defensive posture, dark eyes stared down the sheriff. Emma looked over at Gabrielle with a silent question and got a slight shrug as a response.

Emma knew at that moment she should have stayed in the room until the mayor came out of the bath. *She doesn't like surprises.*

Placing the extra mug as an offering to the obviously upset queen, she sat down hesitantly. "You look like an Amazon, Regina." She tried to smile at the small polite acknowledgment she got from the mayor and then fidgeted nervously in her seat.

Xena spoke up trying to break the obvious tension, "I ordered for us, they have venison stew or venison stew, so I ordered everyone a venison stew, I hope that's okay."

Gabrielle piped up, "I love venison stew! It won't be as good as your mothers," looking sideways at her mate, "but I'm starving so as long as it is mostly dead, I'm pretty sure I'll eat it."

Emma snorted with a mouth full of ale and almost choked on her beverage. Regina dropped her anger instantly and came to Emma's side patting her on the back to help her clear her lungs. "Are you okay?" she asked as the coughing gave way to gasps.

"Yeah, yeah, just typical Swan trying to breathe in her liquid consumption," Emma answered once she could. Regina, relieved, sat back but stayed close.

With the tension successfully broken, the group chatted amicably until the hot food was served by a plump and friendly, redhead. She asked with a chuckle, "Who had the venison?" Gabrielle raised her hand which got a round of laughs from the table. She got served first, three more wooden bowls dropped expertly down, and a spray of wooden spoons dropped to the table, and the server asked if they needed more drink. Xena answered for them all with a gulp and raised four fingers. They ate in silence watching the other patrons get more and more animated as time drew on.

Gabrielle would have had to be blind not to notice the change in the dark-haired woman when she saw her blonde in the arms of the warrior princess. During dinner, she surmised that perhaps Xena's brand of nudging was going to cause issue with their new friends and decided to put the mayor's mind at ease. She crawled under one of Xena's arms and was pleased when the warrior instinctively held her close. She looked into the dark eyes of the mayor and winked hoping the woman would take the hint. Xena has little interest in the sheriff, if anything, she was taken by Regina herself, but the bard knows her warrior knows her place. She looked up at Xena who was scanning the crowd then pulled her chin to attention. Before the warrior could say a word, she pressed her lips to hers and deepened the unusual show of public affection. They were more than just partners or lovers; the warrior was hers.

The bard pulled away, a little breathless and mumbled, "I guess it is time to start the show."
Regina watched as the bard shooed the warrior out of the booth and disappeared into the crowd and Emma leaned in and whispered, "This is going to be awesome."

"It certainly will be an experience," Regina replied then settled down when Gabrielle's soft voice bellowed across the now silent room.

Gabrielle captivated her audience with skill, weaving her tales with precision and grace. Regina was fully entrenched in the show, silent and solemn seeing the imagery play out in her mind as Gabrielle painted with words a tale of good versus evil, love, and betrayal, heroism and sacrifice.

Emma, who had listened to the majority of the story, stopped listening some time ago, looking over at her companion who had been engrossed in the tale, and seemed a much more alluring vision. Her hair was braided back away from her face, and her skin looked more pale than usual against the black and red of her outfit. The way the curve of her breast filled out the top were as if it were made for her specifically. The red that peaked through the dark leather almost illuminated with contrast. Her natural features were scrubbed clean of makeup and the natural plum color of her lips seemed to compliment the outfit perfectly.

She leaned over and whispered to her friend, "You really do look beautiful in that Madam Mayor." Black eyes focused on her mossy green and Emma wanted to turn from their intensity, but couldn't.

"Thank you. Gabrielle helped pour me into it." With a white smile and a pat on a bare thigh, she added, "You are looking very Amazonian yourself, Swan."

"I'm sorry for leaving you up there alone."

"You didn't leave me alone."

"I'm sorry for that too."

Xena tapped the table as their whispering was interrupting, "This is the best part," she scolded, and the women went back to focus their attention on a small blonde center stage.

After the show, Emma begrudgingly admitted that she was indeed drunk on the few mugs of ale that went down far too easy and had her arm draped over the dark little queen who was struggling to hold her up. "Youuuuu," a finger firmly planted between the bard's breasts, "are aaaaamazeballs."

Gabrielle looked up at a satisfied grinning warrior and asked, "A what?"

"Who knows, she's drunk," Xena shrugged with her answer.

Regina, not at all impressed hissed, "Indeed." Daggers shot from pools of darkness directed at the warrior for ordering that last round. "I'll take her to bed," Regina huffed struggling with the swaying sheriff.

"Be gentle with her!" Xena called after them, getting a playful slap from her bard. "Be nice Xena."

"I'm always nice," she responded.

"Come on, it is way passed my warrior's bedtime." Gabrielle clasped her hand and pulled her up the stairs.

After practically losing her balance, and almost all of her patience, they finally made it to the door of their shared accommodations. Regina struggled with the key, dropping it, twice. "Miss Swan!"
she cried out, "Please! Stay still!"

Emma was mumbling into her neck, heating the flesh with her ale soaked breath. Finally, the door swung open and she dropped the sheriff flat on her back at the bottom of the bed. Emma's arms and legs were sprawled wide, and she appeared to be asleep already.

Regina sighed and chuckled at the state of her friend. Her eyes drawn to the shadowed area at the apex of her thighs and she stood motionless, her mind playing back to how the warrior had her arms around the blonde, how Emma had practically encouraged her! The feelings her jealousy brought up was pushed aside when Emma groaned deeply, pulling her leg up tucking her foot under her knee.

Regina turned as she felt the heat from her loins encompass her body. She decided getting ready for bed would distract herself from the sudden reaction she was having at the sight of her unconscious friend.

She managed to remove her skirt and shorts with ease, but she couldn't quite reach the tie at the back of her top. She padded over to the bed; bottom lip tucked between teeth. She shoved Emma's knee a little bit, then a little harder when the woman didn't even budge. "Emma," she whispered.

"Emma," she said more firmly. Nothing.

"Emma!" was louder, along with a nudge. That got a groan and unintelligible murmurs. She was done playing around she crawled up onto the bed leaning over the sleeping blonde, her arms supporting her weight on either side of Emma's head and cried, "Miss Swan!" with a light tap across Emma's face. "Miss Swan. Swan?" She raised her voice even louder, "EMMA! I need you!"

With that Emma's eyes blinked open, "I'm up Henry!" Green eyes focused on the woman hovering over her. "Hi Geeena!" she smiled drunkenly.

"I need your help, Swan, get up."

"I can't there is a mayor in the way," Emma slurred.

Regina patiently closed her eyes, took a deep breath, "We need to get out of these leathers and ready for bed." Emma shook her head vehemently. "Emmmmmaaaaa..." the low, menacing grumble of the woman's name snapped green eyes into focus once again.

"Gina?"

Thank god! We have contact!

"Yes Sheriff Swan, I need your help with something," she added sweetly, "Please?"

A blonde head nodded her approval.

"Okay first sit up."

"You mean I'm not?"

Regina sat back, grabbed the girl's hand and pulled her to a sitting position with far more effort than if Emma had assisted her even remotely.

Emma opened her eyes full, trying to focus, looking around the room and settled on Mayor Mills
sitting on her knees on the edge of the bed, in nothing but her black panties and the leather top she wore for dinner. Emma blinked several times at the image thinking it was probably her all too vivid imagination and then her eyes fluttered closed.

"Emma, dear?"

"Mmhmm?" her eyes still closed with a goofy grin plastered across her face.

"Can you grab this string for me?" she turned her back and pointed to where she needed the sheriff to pull.

Emma's eyes snapped open, blinking slowly again but moved to assist nonetheless. Her fingers touched Regina's skin tentatively at the base of her neck, feeling the silkiness beneath her tips. She gently slid down over the brunette's shoulder blade then reached the band of leather and pulled on one of the strings, then the other one, then a third. She was making it worse the leather was knotting up, and her drunkenly fat fingers wouldn't work together to loosen the jumbled mess. Emma leaned back now all of what little focus she had was pointed at the task at hand. She mumbled, "I'm sorry I'm ruining your beautiful stuff."

Regina still reeling from the blonde's explorative caress shook her head clear, "It's okay Emma, just do the best you can to loosen it." She felt the blonde move in real close, too close, then a tug on her top, when she felt the woman's lips graze her spine she yelped, "Emma! What are you doing?"

Emma having a mouth full of leather tugging on the knot with her teeth mumbled, "It's okay Ialmostgotit!" she yanked one last time and pulled her head away from Regina's back. "HA!" A triumphant savior stood up on her knees arms in the air. "Emma Swan for the win!" she exclaimed and collapsed back on the bed.

Regina's heart raced at the intimate touches. Her hands clasped around her now loosened top, her chest heaving as she breathed deeply, trying to calm her body. She stood, collecting her senses, and marched into the bathing area without a word. She pulled the leather portion of her top off, inspecting the now wet ties from around the back expecting Emma had chewed through them, surprisingly they were intact. She slipped on one of the white sleeping shirts Gabrielle left for them and brought the other one with her to try and convince a very drunk Emma to change.

Regina sweet-talked a stubborn savior into removing the leather outfit she had on, and the woman was now laying on her stomach in nothing but her panties. "I don't wanna!" she covered her face with her hands like she was five years old again. "Emma, please?" she was tired of arguing and was this close to letting the woman just sleep in the nude.

The creamy white back of Emma Swan rhythmically rising and falling with her ever-deepening breath stirred things in Regina that the mayor wasn't ready to think about and now she was just angry at the situation, and tired of fighting and frankly, pissed off. She threw her hands up and tossed the cotton sleepwear across the room and huffed, "FINE."

Emma had been mumbling something incoherent then lifted her head as Regina walked around the room extinguishing candles. "Huh?" Emma questioned.

Patience depleted, Regina snapped, "What?!"

"Why Regina?" the mumbled question had been repeated.

"Why what, Miss Swan?"

"I know. I'm clumsy, and trouble and no one could ever love an annoying brat. Mrs. Havisham was
right." Emma's eyes were closed, partially because she was unable to open them but mostly to keep the room from spinning out of control then thumped her head back down on the pillow.

"Who?Whatever do you mean? Emma?" Regina felt a tight pull in her chest; there was something she is missing, or perhaps if she heard what the woman was mumbling she would have made more sense? Her brow furrowed, she wanted clarification that she knew she wasn't going to get tonight, if ever.

Emma breathed in deeply and let out a sigh. "You looked so beautiful tonight Gina. You always look so beautiful. Even when we climbed out of that lake and you looked like a drowned rat, you were a beautiful drowned rat," her voice trailed off.

"Thank you, I think."

Another sigh from the savior and she rolled over onto her back. Regina has seen the woman in the buff before, but never this close. Never without the scrutiny of being observed. The chilled air perked the peaks of her breasts to tight pink points, and almost as if she knew how sexy it was, Emma lifted her arms above her head and stretched. Her breathing deepened, and Regina realized she was passing out. She lifted the blankets that were pushed aside and covered the savior, pushing a few golden strands away from the girl's face. "You were beautiful tonight too," she dared to whisper to the girl.

"I love you R'gina." The sleepy form grabbed the hand that had come to rest on the girl's shoulder pulled it to her lips and kissed it gently. Regina's eyes bugged in surprise but didn't pull away. The first thought she had when she blinked in shock at the words that were almost a whisper. It wasn't an ambiguous *I love you*, where it could have been meant for anyone, she said 'Regina.' Her brow creased and a frown tugged at the corners of her mouth.

She's drunk. *She means she loves me like I'm her son's mother.* The tension started to slip from her as the logic of her explanation sat well within her. She was too tired to think about anything more profound than that. She settled down next to the intoxicated blonde, closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

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Xena pinned her bard against the door jamb of their room, the alcohol that was coursing through her veins allowed her to unabashedly grope the blonde in the public hallway of the inn.

"Xena!" Gabrielle groaned out as the dark-haired warrior bit into her neck with exuberance. The warrior's hands slid up the side of the little blonde's ribs and rested over top of her breasts. Gabrielle managed to untangle herself from the anxious hands of her lover long enough to unlock their door and once the wooden barrier was opened the two increased their need for one another.

"Emma! I NEED YOU!" was clearly heard through the thin walls and both the warrior and the bard burst out in a fit of giggles.

Gabrielle was the first to calm herself and kissed the tall brunette. "It's really not funny, Regina looked properly cross with my wicked warrior," she commented with a sly smile.

"MmHmm... Yes, she did," Xena's eyes hooded as she looked down at her lover.

Gabrielle chuckled, "You are terrible you know that?" A very old wisp of low self-esteem passed over the blonde, and her green eyes looked down, "She is very beautiful."

"And tough," Xena added grabbing at Gabrielle's covered breast.
"And high maintenance," Gabrielle added between kissing her warrior.

"I do like a challenge," Xena agreed as she slid her hands down the blonde's thighs then dragged her skirt back up with them.

"Xena!" The blonde exclaimed.

"What?" The brunette stopped what she was doing and asked the bard seriously, "I know you're not jealous. You know where my heart lies!"

"Yeah but I also know how much you love a challenge! Breaking that woman would…"

"Be a two-woman job," Xena whispered into her bard's ear, taking the blonde's earlobe into her mouth and gently sucked it.

"I'm sure Emma would appreciate the help," Gabrielle chuckled as her warrior pulled back with a pout.

"Tell me you wouldn't want to see that girl on her knees," Xena knelt before her queen and slipped her fingers under the woman's tight skirt and grabbed the tops of her panties and slid them down over her thick muscular thighs. "Looking up at you... with her doe brown eyes," Xena kissed the inside of Gabrielle's thigh gently, and the bard instinctively fisted a hand full of black raven hair. "Those soft lips..." Xena continued undisturbed, "aching to taste you," she kissed the deep valley between the blonde's thigh and her mound. "Her hands tied behind her back, completely at your mercy, her eyes pleading with you, 'May I Mistress?' in her deep sultry voice," Xena's tongue slid up the wet edge of Gabrielle's lips. Blue eyes looked up to impossibly dark green, and the bard rolled her hips against Xena's tongue. "That's what I thought," the warrior smirked.

Gabrielle pulled the warrior's head back and looked her straight in the eyes. "I'm not saying it wouldn't be fun to break her, brat! I'm saying we are not going to. Those two have enough going on without adding us to the mix! You need to leave poor Emma alone. You got me?"

"Yes, my Queen," Xena grumbled. "You never let me have any fun!" The warrior pouted on the floor before her, and Gabrielle smiled wide. "Did you pick up our package from San Lucas, brat?" A wide smile replaced the pout when Xena nodded.

"Good. Go take off your clothes and put it on and wait for me on the bed," Gabrielle commanded. "I'm going to give you an opportunity to prove your loyalty to the Amazon Nation! You will be denied release until I feel as though you have thoroughly committed yourself to the pleasure of your Queen, and then, and only then will I permit you to come."

Xena looked up at her queen with dark azure eyes, "I love you so much."

"I know," Gabrielle smirked back at her warrior.
Chapter 8

Emma opened her dry eyes to the sun's judging light and winced. Pushing the blonde out of her face she blinked, her eyes searched the area for something familiar, and stopped when they caught sight of a brunette standing in a towel brushing out her hair in front of the mirror. Emma wracked her mind trying to recall the last part of the evening but was drawing a blank. Her head was pounding with the effort.

"Well you are lucky you decided to finally get up, Xena has been pacing a rut out in the market waiting. How's your head?" Regina got a groan for an answer which made her smile.

"That ale had more of a kick than I'm used to," Emma admitted. She suddenly realized she was completely naked under the covers. "Uh…" she sat up with a bolt, "Why am I…? uhhhh…" Regina looked over at her as she re-braided her hair. "You were a ghastly brat and wouldn't put on a nightgown. I completely see where my son gets it from."

Emma frowned, "Did you just call Henry a brat?" The brunette shot a look that could kill, and stabbed Emma as an answer. "Regina I didn't mean… I…" A satisfied smile touched the Queen's regal face too brief for the sheriff to see then she sternly said, "Will you please get dressed, now?" Emma could feel the question posed was not a request and slowly got up, tucked the cotton sheet over herself and shuffled into the bathing area to get herself together.

She's mad. I must have done something.

That's because you are a troublesome girl Emma. The voice of one of her fosters echoed in her mind. Emma scrunched up her brow at the foster mother's rhetoric, "You are a troublesome girl Emma, and no one could ever love you. No wonder you were abandoned."

Once in the bathing room, Emma scolded herself for allowing that woman to get in her head but she thought on some level that the old lady was right. Regina was irritated, she had gotten drunk and caused a problem. She heard the outer door close without a word from Regina.

Oh yeah, she's pissed.

She closed her eyes, and the tears came out of nowhere, and she knew it was going to be a long day.

He saw Xena early that morning, looking anxious and pacing in the marketplace as he was leaving the healer's tent with the ingredients he needed stowed in his pack. She had another Amazon with her, another blonde, but this one wasn't wrapped up in the warrior's arms. He surmised it was the bard's guard, not that it mattered, once Xena was disarmed the guard would be easy pickings. His thoughts turned sinister as he considered harming both blondes. He smiled at his own wickedness. He has heard the rumors that Amazons were all untouched by man. His body trembled at the thought of the untamed and untapped woman struggling under him. His manhood stiffened at the image of Xena's blonde reeling in agony as he has his way with her. Hurting her in all of the ways he could.

His thoughts moved onto his plan, and he figured Xena would be taking her bard and the escort back to the Amazon Nation, that was the direction the barely visible trail had been leading him. He knew he needed to get to them before they entered the territory. The Amazons were known to be
particularly cruel to men who harmed them and not in a fun way. In a lose your jewels before being drawn and quartered kind of way.

None of that was on his agenda, so he mounted his horse, adjusting himself to accommodate his throbbing member and took off out of town.

Xena was anxiously pacing when she eyed Regina emerging from the inn, alone. Xena sighed. She'd been ready to go for hours; the little blonde clearly couldn't handle her liquor, Xena smiled deviously as she wondered what went on in the room across the hall after the door had closed. They had heard some grunting and Regina's exasperated pleading with the Sheriff, which was drowned out quickly by their own activities. Gabrielle saw the hope in Xena's face disappear at the sight of the little brunette walking down the stairs alone.

Regina informed them that Emma was coming, slowly. Xena rolled her eyes and got a tongue lashing from the Mayor, "Well… if someone stopped pouring ale when I asked her to we would be halfway to the Amazons by now." Xena, properly chastised, looked down at the ground, those black eyes still on her and the Mayor continued, "She is a brat sober, trying to get her ready for bed was impossible."

Xena grinned but kept her eyes on the ground silently, enjoying the strength of the dark Queen.

Gabrielle jumped to her warrior's defense, "And here I thought Emma was an adult."

The intrusion was rebutted with daggers from the Queen who had just about enough of bratty backtalk to last her a lifetime but didn't dignify the comment with a response. Gabrielle sighed and started toward the steps, "I'll go see what is taking her, Xena go ahead and go to San Lucas' with Regina."

Gabrielle knocked at the door gently then entered calling Emma's name. The blonde looked like centaur dung dried in the sun, but she was dressed. Her brow creased with sympathy as she walked toward the bed. "Hey, buddy, how you doing this morning?" Emma's red eyes looked up.

"Are you okay?" the bard asked, suddenly concerned that Regina hurt the girl with her venomous tongue before leaving.

"I… I think I may have done something… bad…" she shrugged her thin frame seemingly frailer than it actually was. "What could you have possibly done?" the bard asked gently.

"I… I… don't remember last night, coming up here… but I woke up… naked… and… and Regina is… angry with me I think." Her voice cracked, and tears started to fall. She felt the weight of exhaustion and tried to hold in her emotions that were brimming so close to the surface.

"I'm fairly certain that Regina's mood is not of your doing, but of Xena's," Gabrielle reassured.

The Sheriff looked up at her, honest confusion and a bit of sorrow in her eyes. "If it is any consolation she didn't say anything," the bard said trying to cheer the girl up. "Not about you anyway. She ripped a strip off Xena for getting you dru…"

The blonde interrupted, "I wasn't forced to drink, Regina is just…"

The bard took her turn to interrupt, "Is just… not blaming you, Emma."

The Sheriff thought about that for a moment, and it made her feel a little better. She was able to
smile up at the Amazon with hope in her eyes. "You think so? I can't remember anything, what if I did something to make her... uncomfortable? Gabrielle, it's taken so long to get to this place between us. If I did unwanted things to her?" The heinous idea struck true fear in those green eyes.

"Well I don't know her that well, and she certainly plays a close hand, however, I'm pretty sure if you had you'd know about it. She doesn't seem the type to hold things in or keep them to herself."

Emma looked up sadly and said, "You'd be surprised at how much she can hide. Especially if she's genuinely hurt."

"I think the worst thing you did was be obstinate, but maybe talk to her about it?" Gabrielle kissed the blonde's crown and added, "Don't beat yourself up honey, your hangover on the road will be punishment enough." She chuckled at Emma's groan and informed, "That being said, my warrior is going stir crazy down there, and I fear a visit from the Princess formerly known as Destroyer of Nations if we don't get on the road soon."

They walked through the artisan district in strained silence. Regina, ever the queen, led the way, but now stood waiting for Xena to enter San Lucas' hut first.

Xena held the privacy curtain aside for Her Majesty to enter, which she did with grace. The towering figure stood from his bench and greeted the women, Xena with a hearty handshake, Regina with a delicate kiss on the knuckles. The gesture was taken as it was intended, as a show of reverence. Regina appreciated being treated like the queen she was.

*That doesn't happen nearly enough anymore,* she thought to herself with a sigh.

As Xena and he were discussing things not her business, she had a look around the shop. Several piles of leather pants and suede sword scabbards with beautiful embroidered designs lay about upon wooden tables that lined the wall. Her eye caught the sight of something she hadn't seen yesterday.

A beautifully hand carved longbow hung on the wall. The wood had the most delicate designs etched into it. It had been rubbed to a sheen with oil, and the grip was soft leather.

*It was simply exquisite.*

She thought about how Emma had protected her from the bandits and reasoned that she was well versed in the usage of such a weapon, but deep down she just wanted it. It was fit for a queen. She thought about what she had to trade, and her fingers found the gold band that hung around her neck. The band she got from Robin before his dead wife was suddenly brought back to life. It was a promise ring.

*Promises are never kept. Not to her.* She kept the ring as a reminder of that fact. She took the ring off the chain she wore around her neck and went to go make an offer.

Xena looked skeptical and asked, "Do you even know how to use it?" She took in the small dainty woman running her soft uncalloused fingers over the smooth wood.

Regina looked up from the exquisite detail of the bow and smiled. "Of course Xena. I may not have been an Amazon Queen, but my father made sure I could be of some use on a hunt."

Hesitantly she asked, "That surprises you, Warrior Princess?"

Xena, ever honest, replied, "Yeah."
Regina looked up, unable to mask the hurt in her eyes quick enough and Xena quickly added, "But it is a beautiful bow Your Majesty and suits you thoroughly."

A soft reassuring pat to Regina's bicep brought a small thoughtful smile to her face. "Indeed."
Regina looked over at San Lucas who was studying the gold piece closely, "So do we have a deal?"
He stooped down below the back of the counter and pulled out a quiver full of hand-carved arrows along with a sharpening stone and a small vial of oil for maintenance of the weapon. "We have a deal."

She smiled wide, "Fantastic."

Regina slipped off Emma's high tops and slid on her new mid-calf leather boots; they fit perfectly much to Regina's surprise. She stood and walked around a bit to get the feel of them. The leather was soft and supple, not binding yet supportive of her arches. They were the most comfortable shoes she had ever worn, and she looked up at the artist with admiration. "Thank you, San Lucas, these are perfect."

He smiled warmly and winked at Xena and said, "Only the best for my friends."

When they concluded their business and said their goodbyes, Regina stopped Xena outside the hut with a tentative look and a light touch. "Xena," she started, "Thank you." She hesitated briefly, "I'm sorry for losing my composure with you this morning, I... I..."
Xena looked down and furrowed her brow allowing the woman to collect her thoughts without scrutiny.

"I..." Regina began again, "I understand that I can be quick to lay blame, and it was lain upon you unfairly. Emma and I..." She looked up hoping the blue in the sky will help her find the proper words, "...have an arduous relationship, to say the least, and last night... well..." Xena finally looked into the woman's dark eyes, a deep red flushed the Queen's delicate features, "was awkward," she finished painfully, hoping Xena would understand without details of said awkwardness.

Despite Regina, Xena felt a kinship with this woman. She looked thoughtful and replied, "Well, Regina, you really have nothing to apologize for. Your delivery is sometimes..." She smiled, "upfront. But I appreciate a more direct approach. Most people don't, but I'm not most people." A wider smile spread across the warrior's face, "If anything, I am aware I contributed to Emma's impairment last night. If that caused issues between you two, I apologize. I see my friendship with Gabrielle, you know," carefully, "before we became, more... when I look at the two of you. Perhaps, as a result, I've come to conclusions about your dynamic that may be just projection on my part? And for that I'm sorry."

Regina bit at the inside of her cheek and pursed her brow in consideration at the admission. "I'm fairly certain as to our dynamic, she, Emma that is, lost the love of her life. Recently. After he tried to kill her entire family." Regina wrapped her arms around herself and added, "and me. In the end, she did the right thing and killed him, but it destroyed her. I'm one of the few people she confides in." The intimacy she felt during their stay in this strange new world was quietly set aside, and the Mayor added pragmatically, "I won't jeopardize that simply because we have chemistry."

Xena looked her directly in the eye, with a level of understanding that moved Regina, and said, "Chemistry. Right. I'm sure you will figure it out, Regina."

"I believe I have dear." She dropped her gaze, fingering the empty chain around her neck. "Happily-ever-after is not in the cards for me."
Xena leaned in and lifted Regina's chin to force her to look her in the eye once again, "Happily-ever-after is a high bar to measure yourself by."

Regina blinked as if snapping out of a dream when the words the warrior said registered within her. "You are so much more than how you are depicted in your stories, dear."

Xena laughed at this, "I would certainly hope so, Your Majesty."
Chapter 9

He rode his horse hard putting a sizable distance between himself and his ambush targets. His eyes saw the clearing where his plan would be realized, and his heart started to pound with excitement. He knew this area very well and chose this spot specifically for its thick cover around the edges of the clearing, and its common rest point for weary travelers. He dismounted his sweat-slicked steed, pulled off the saddle and bridle and smacked the beast on the rear to shoo him off, which he did gladly trotting towards the much-desired stream.

The man started a small fire and proceeded to mix together the ingredients he acquired from the healer's tent. Once the concoction was bubbling, he added the crooked dry root that was going to make his dreams come true. The thick black syrupy liquid steaming away took on a greenish tint from the root when it was ready. A wicked smile crossed his scarred face. "Perfect," he said aloud to no one.

He proceeded to prepare the darts he laid out, coating each one, allowing them to dry then coated them again. Three ought to do it, if he missed three times, Xena would be sure to detect the direction and find him. "So don't miss," he said aloud to himself.

This is too important not to be cautious. He knew that she would hear the first dart if he missed, the second one would give her trajectory, if he missed with the third, there was no need for a fourth. He coated each dart an extra two times, rationalizing that she wasn't a typical woman remembering how she could drink every man in her army under the table and still be able to fight with skilled ease.

He wanted to be with her, she was magnificent, but she had toyed with him like a cat with a mouse, then tossed him aside when he no longer amused her. His anger getting the better of him for just an unbridled moment as memories of his departure from her army rushed into his mind. She will pay. This plan was foolproof, and he was no fool. He would take her toy and break it, and she would know the pain he felt.

The bard will understand his pain, intimately. She will never be able to love again and perhaps if he is lucky she'll break the way he's broken others. He gathered up the darts gently and cleaned up his work area making sure to leave it as if it were untouched. Untouched like the bard he goaded himself, then prepared his perch high in the canopy and waited for his prey.

They finally got on the road, Xena walked ahead of them leading Argo, Regina now outfitted with sensible shoes, walked behind her quietly. Gabrielle and Emma took up the rear chatting in hushed tones amongst themselves. Xena took a deep breath, this was much better. She hated wasting time, and moving always felt like she was accomplishing something, even if it was at a painfully slow saunter, she'd take it, it was better than waiting.

They've been on the road for several candle marks, and the familiar path told Xena they were really only a candle mark or so, of her normal pace, outside of the town they had just left. Still, she stiffened in her resolve, they were moving. It was really all she could hope for on the sweltering hot day.

It was humid, unusually so for the time of year, the summer had long ago wound down, the leaves started to change but hadn't started falling off the trees just yet, she took a drink from her leather skin and passed it back to Regina who took it eagerly.
"Thank you." The gratitude was quiet and polite. Her conversation with the mayor had been enlightening. She felt like she really understood Regina, as she herself once stood silent with uncertainty. Xena rolled her eyes and felt a little sorry for pushing the couple. If only for Regina's sake, the look on Emma's face while atop Argo yesterday was truly priceless. However, feelings of remorse surfaced for the sadness in the Mayor her meddling had caused, and she regretted her role in that sadness.

Regina retrieved the water skin from the girls she passed it to and took another sip herself. They were walking out into a clearing, and Xena slowed and called back, "This would be a good spot for a late lunch. Emma, could you gather some wood? Regina, help Gabrielle with setting up a makeshift camp, I'll go get something to eat." When everyone had their assignments, the women went to work. Xena saw the cohesion of their group and thought how good it felt to lead a charge, even if it were just food preparation. So, fish or rabbit? She thought to herself.

She started to go down towards the river but stopped when she remembered Regina purchased a bow that morning. "Regina?" she called as she turned and came back up into the camp. The call caught the brunette's attention, and the woman came over to her. She asked for the bow, and it was promptly removed from around her shoulders and handed over.

When the woman went to take off the quiver, Xena heard a faint whirr, and Regina exclaimed, "Ow!"

Another whirr when Regina stepped closer to Xena as she pulled a small thin dart from the back of her arm she questioned, "What the hell? OW!" Regina was hit again this time in the neck. The second dart blurred her vision, and she collapsed into Xena's arms.

Xena yelled for Gabrielle and Emma to get down, "We are under attack!" She crouched down with her eyes wide, searching, listening for more whirs that never came. The forest was dead silent, just the sound of leaves in the breeze.

Emma noticed Regina was slack in Xena's arms. She screamed the brunette's name and ran toward her. "Regina! NO!" She dropped to her knees and lifted Regina's limp body into her arms, "Gina wake up! Please! Wake up!" Xena put her hand over Emma's mouth as she tried to listen to the area, but it was no use, there was nothing. Xena dragged the unconscious body of the Queen over to some bushes, and Emma followed, green eyes wide with fear, but stayed silent.

Gabrielle met them in a low crouch and took the dart from Xena and sniffed it. It wasn't poison, not to kill anyway. She touched the side of the dart to her tongue and shook her head at the sour taste. Emma pulled the second dart from Regina's neck, her hands shaking visibly.

Xena stood, still listening, scanning the area. She slowly lifted her chakram from its home at her hip, heard the scraping noise again, soles against tree bark, she pinpointed the source and let her chakram fly. The familiar high pitched whirring sound filled the area and then broken bark as it quickly bounced off trunks and branches repositioning its trajectory toward its intended target, then a wet thud ended the whirl, a male's cry cut short then a heavy thud to the forest floor. Xena walked off in the direction of the final noise to retrieve her weapon.

Gabrielle turned Regina onto her back lifting her eyelids, checking her painfully faint pulse and holding her cheek to the woman's nose to verify she was still breathing. She looked up at Emma, whose eyes were wild with concern, and reassured, "She's alive." She started with the good news, "The dart had something on it, it doesn't seem deadly," Not that it couldn't end that way.

Emma pulled at the unconscious body, "Please, please, Gina wake up. WAKE UP! Please!" The pleas went unanswered from a cold, silent sleep.
The cries of the Sheriff echoed into the afternoon as Xena carefully strode towards her prey. She didn't hear any rustling, limping or even groaning, so she assumed whomever it was caught the business side of her chakram and was dead. She saw the motionless dark form and ran over to it turning it over. "MALIK?!" she spat as the dead eyes looked up at her, chakram firmly planted in the side of his skull. She pulled it out with a sickening slurp then wiped his clumpy gore from the blade against his black tunic. She searched him and found one last dart, she knew she was the target, and she closed her eyes when thoughts of yet another innocent cut down for her evil past.

How many more would there be?

"You stupid son of a bitch!" She punched his corpse in anger. His actions that now caused her feelings of regret. Regret that Regina was hurt and probably dead, judging by the wails echoing in the woods, regret that she didn't kill this bottom feeder when she had the chance ten cycles ago.

She knew he was bad news. She found out just how bad he was and finally ran him out of her army. He had a real evil streak, lust of pain and power. He raped women and children and sometimes the men. She had known he relished in the torment of others but never knew the details. However she knew he had been the lowest of the low, but he was devoted to her cause, so she kept him around. Until she heard from the other men what he was doing to the village's they conquered. Her anger reached a fevered pitch, and she regretted he was dead; she would have enjoyed making him suffer. Again.

She spat on his corpse then left him to rot in the summer sun.

Gabrielle grabbed Emma by the shoulders and looked her dead in the eye and stated clearly, "Regina has one chance Em, and this is it. She has two puncture wounds," pointing them out to the bleary-eyed blonde. "I need you to suck out as much of whatever was on these," holding up the darts, "If she has any chance we need to get that venom out of her as soon as possible," Gabrielle directed quickly. Emma looked dumbstruck but sniffed up her runny nose, and nodded in understanding.

"I need to make the wound larger so you can get as much out as possible."

Emma stood still and watched as Gabrielle sliced through Regina's skin, opening the wounds to about an inch long. Emma then proceeded to bend down to the first wound. "Don't swallow, suck and spit Emma. Alternate between the two, stop when you can't taste the venom or no more blood flows."

Gabrielle stood and ran over to Argo, she grabbed the bedroll, the healer bag, a fresh waterskin, and Emma's red leather jacket. She rolled out the bed next to the fire pit, and put down the supplies. She folded up the jacket and put it at one end of the bed then went back to Emma who was carrying out her assigned task on the woman's neck, drawing deeply then spitting through her worried tears.

Gabrielle knelt next to her and proceeded to assist by attending to the other puncture wound. She slowed her efforts as the bitter taste was no longer present, and the blood stopped. She then said to Emma, "We need to get her over to the..."

Xena suddenly appeared and bent down to pick up the limp woman and carried her over to the bedroll her lover set out. She looked down and saw all the things she would need to help the mayor, then looked up at Gabrielle and nodded, acknowledging the bard's expertise setup. Xena took over the healer duties, and Gabrielle pulled Emma away, asking her to help her set up the camp. They would be staying until Regina could be moved to a proper healer back in town. "Let Xena work. There is nothing we can do, other than start a fire to help warm her."
"She… she's so cold, is she gonna…" not being able to say the word, Emma stopped. Gabrielle grabbed both of her hands up and looked her straight in the eye and reassured, "Not if we can help it. You did a great job getting the poison out of her. She is still with us, so there is a good chance she will survive."

_Survive._ Emma thought to herself, that isn't the same as living. _She could be in a coma, and we are a universe away from a hospital. She needs a doctor. She needs… to wake the fuck up._ Emma felt her emotion overwhelm her again as she stacked the wood in the pre-dug fire pit and struggled to hold it at bay. She watched as Xena worked on the limp body, she touched the woman, then bent down and listened to her heart and checked her breath.

Xena called out with urgency to Gabrielle, "COME!" The bard dropped her pile of wood and ran over to Xena. She dropped down to the side of Regina and started to count; Xena straddled the brunette across the hips and started pushing on her chest then paused when Gabrielle blew into her mouth.

_Oh my god, she is dying! She has stopped breathing, her heart has stopped, and she is leaving me!_ Emma ran over, staying clear of the women working on her friend, and bent down and pleaded into Regina's ear, "Don't you dare leave me! Do you hear me Madam Mayor!? YOU STAY! Henry needs his mom! Henry needs you, Regina. I... need you... please please stay Gina," her fingers stroked jet black hair and allowed words to tumble from her lips, "I... I love you, you hear me? I NEED you, you are my world, and I can't live this life without you. I didn't fall into the portal, you did, but I couldn't let you go! I didn't want to be without you, not for a single moment, so I jumped in after you!" She sniffled back her upset and pleaded, "Please I love you, don't leave me." Xena stopped Gabrielle, and Emma screamed, "NO!"

Xena shushed her and bent down to listen again. She felt below the Queen's nose and smiled. "We got her back." The warrior let out a satisfied sigh.

Emma clasped her mouth with her hands trying to hold in her hope, fearing if she let herself feel it, Regina would be ripped away from her again. Xena rested her hand on the thin blonde, and said, "I need you to breathe too." Emma let out her held breath and sobbed. She jumped into Xena's arms in a very grateful embrace. "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Xena!"

Xena pulled away from her, and guilt darkened her face, "Don't thank me."

Gabrielle knew that look and asked the question, "Who did this?"

"He's dead," she answered as she got up off of the unconscious queen then explained, "An ex-soldier of mine, Malik. He was a cruel little man and this," she held up the darts, "was payback for banning him from my army so many cycles ago."

Gabrielle took in a breath when she realized she could be standing over Xena's limp body right now, ..._and he wouldn't be dead, he would be..._ She didn't let herself finish the thought. "I didn't just banish him," Xena continued, "I tortured him." A grimace covered her face as she remembered the man's screams. "I let my men rape him and torture him for weeks before I left him for dead."

Gabrielle stiffened at the brutal admission. "Why… would you do that? Even as the Warlord," she always talked of Xena's dark side as if it were a different person from the woman she loved. It was how she quantified what the woman had done from who the woman was now. "You were never… I mean you could be..."

"Cruel," Xena finished. "I could be cruel, and I made an example out of him. He raped villagers under my banner. He forced himself onto little girls, disfiguring them for life simply because he
could. I thought it would be a fitting punishment."

Emma was kneeling next to her queen, staring up at the warrior then simply said, "It sounds like it was."

"But..." Xena winced.

"But nothing." Emma finished. "This could have easily been you. Or me," she barked motioning to Gabrielle, "or her. THIS," she waved her arms about the campsite, "doesn't get filed under Xena's repayable debt, get it? Got it? Good," she said with more confidence than either woman had ever seen in her.

"The Savior has spoken," Gabrielle said with shocked eyes.

"Damn right I have, now you," she said looking down at the stillness of her friend, "Get your ass up because I'm not explaining this to your son."

Xena felt for her pulse once more, "Much better," she said with a satisfied pat on the woman's leg. "I'll go grab some fish..."

Her mind teased her...

_That is why she was hit because you wanted to catch a rabbit with the bow because it was harder than your chakram. He was after you, and they are paying the price._

_He is dead,_ she reasoned as she made her way down to the stream, and Regina would live. Knowing the dead man's sadistic side, she assumed he wasn't trying to kill her, and so she felt confident the darts weren't lethal. It almost killed Regina because it was a dose for Xena.

_He probably figured with me out of the way, the Amazon escort would be easy pickings, he probably would have tried to sell them, or..._ She closed her eyes at the memory of the horrors that were relayed by her men so long ago. "worse," she said aloud, then pulled a large trout out from under the surface of the water with her bare hands and trudged back to camp.

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Emma barely ate her dinner. She sat with her legs folded under her, Regina's wrist in her hand, nimble fingers on the woman's pulse point. _Steady beat. Getting stronger._ She didn't move. Her two companions long ago stopped trying to engage her in conversation and stopped prodding her to eat.

Xena was sitting atop a large boulder, sharpening her sword methodically, and Gabrielle was trying to write in her diary, with little luck. No one spoke, and when it was time to rest, Xena knelt next to Emma and said, "I'll stay up with her, you need to get some sleep." The Savior shook her head. Xena knew better than to argue. She wouldn't have moved if it had been Gabrielle, she just patted the woman on the shoulder and checked Regina's vitals once more. The brunette's heart was strong but she was very cold and that concerned her. She whispered to Emma, "You can still get some rest and stay close to her, your body heat would do her some good."

Emma felt the Queen's face and nodded, she crawled under the blanket and covered as much of Regina as she could with her own body to warm her. Xena pulled the blanket over them, almost tucking them in, rested a hand on the back of Emma's head and got up and went to her own queen.

"You two must have gotten most of the poison out of her." She placed a hand on Gabrielle's arm, "Good job. You probably saved her life you know." The bard looked up, Xena saw the tear stains
on the younger woman's cheeks and knew her fears. "Hey," she started, "it's okay. She's alive. We are okay."

Gabrielle's green eyes darkened to almost emerald, and the tears started fresh. "I know, this time, we are okay. How much more are you going to have to pay for your past? Until you lose your life? Or mine? When is enough? When is the debt paid? How long will you be afraid to live your life because just around the corner some idiot with a grudge has some stupid plan to hurt you for something you did over 15 cycles ago?! Gods Xena!" She hung her head and let out a soft sob.

"Gabrielle," Xena said softly, she didn't know what to say. She didn't have an answer. She, herself, has asked that exact question, hundreds of times, and never got an answer. "Do you feel unsafe? The Amazons…"

The Queen looked up with chilled eyes, "Don't you EVEN say it. Don't you EVEN THINK IT. NO. That is NOT what I'm talking about Xena, Gods!" She didn't want to be, but she was properly angry. The day has taken its toll on the bard, and she lashed out. "That is always your first thought, isn't it? Things getting hard? Dump off Gabrielle with the Amazons, or at home, or or or… Wherever you are not! I'm sick of it Xena! So just don't okay?"

She sat up facing her, and her voice raised a little more than she wanted it to, "I go where you go. If you go to Tartarus and face Hades himself, I will trudge through the shit with you! I am in love with you, you big dumb warrior and you are not ever, and I mean EVER, getting rid of me. Not in this life, not in the next. You are MINE." The Queen had spoken. End of discussion. She grabbed Xena and pulled her into an embrace. "Jerk," got whispered into the tall woman's ear.

Xena wiped a tear from her own cheek as they pull back from one another. "Ok, I get it. But… Gabrielle, sweetheart, I may never be done paying for my past." She looked over at Emma and Regina, "Innocent people always get caught up in my shit. I don't like it, I downright hate it, but what can I do? I can't go back and not be a warlord. Even if I could, I wouldn't want to, that path led me to you, and you are the sun that gives me life."

Gabrielle didn't want to broach the subject with her just yet, she wasn't even sure this was something she truly wanted, but here goes nothing...

"Well…" the blonde said, and the warrior looked at her, puzzled, "We could always follow them…" green eyes looking over at the two still bodies. Xena followed her gaze and looked doubtful, Gabrielle knew she was losing her already, she put her hands up to stop her warrior from sinking into that doubt. "Hear me out. They have plenty of excitement, good versus evil and all that to keep us busy for cycles to come…" she trailed off letting that sink into her warrior for just a moment. "The only difference would be, you wouldn't run into every two-bit lunatic with a score to settle every time you turned around. It would be a fresh start, for both of us."

She covered Xena's hand with her own to drive home her point. "We could have a home," she brought that hand to her lips and kissed it gently. "We could have…" her hand caressed Xena's cheek slowly, tracing down her jawline to her chin, "A family…" she smiled to herself.

Yeah okay, maybe I do want this a little more than I thought I did.

To drive it home, she added "We'd still be helping people. They could use a hero with your many… skills."

Xena grabbed Gabrielle and pulled her into a passionate kiss, pouring all the love she had for this woman into it, and when they broke apart, she said, "Yes."
"Okay," Gabrielle smiled and kissed her again. "I love you, Xena."

"I am in love with you my bard."
Chapter 10

Snow White stood in the arms of her best friend, Ruby Lucas, as they looked on towards the volunteer townsfolk of Storybrooke while they slowly removed rubble from the mouth of the mineshaft. Snow had been inconsolable when David reported back the missing women were likely within the mine that collapsed two days ago. Her daughter and her former nemesis and sort of frenemy Regina Mills were out on location looking into the strange and sudden ground shifting.

Regina insisted that it was not a natural phenomenon and accompanied the Sheriff during the investigation. This was two days ago, and the women hadn't been heard from since.

A new collapse was found by her husband yesterday evening, and Snow didn't want to believe that her daughter was dead. No trace of the women, other than the Sheriff's yellow Volkswagen, had been found. The fact that the bug was discovered outside of the mouth of the mines was in itself damning evidence, or so said David, but she held hope that there was a pocket of air, that they were trapped within, alive.

"Honey why don't you go home, this is a slow process, and you've been here through the night. You need to get some sleep." Caring blue eyes pleaded with his wife's red-rimmed green ones to listen to reason, "Granny can't watch Henry indefinitely. I'm certain he'd want to sleep in his own bed tonight."

"W-what am I supposed to tell him David?" the brunette buried her head into her tall friend's collar, protecting herself from his answer.

"Tell him we don't know anything yet because we don't. We'll find her, Snow. One way or another."

Red rolled her eyes at the blond man and his insensitive off-handed comment as the little brunette started to shake in her arms and cried, "I can't lose her again!"

"We still have hope," Red said with certainty. "If they are down there, no one is dead, I would be able to smell it, okay?"

Snow nodded and cringed a little at her friend's bluntness. It was one of the reasons why she loved the wolf, the girl never pulled her punches, and she was fiercely loyal. When Snow needed the truth, Red never let her down.

"If they aren't down there, then where are they?" The pixie-haired woman looked up into the green eyes of her friend.

"I don't know sweetie, but the woods around town are pretty vast," Red's green eyes looked to David, "Perhaps we can get a search party out in the woods of the surrounding area? Just in case. Maybe something happened to one of them, and the other doesn't want to leave them?" She looked back down at Snow in her arms, "That's just like Emma you know? Always the savior." Snow nodded in agreement and sniffled back her tears.

"Alright. I'll go pick up Henry, but David," she looked him sternly in the eye, "You call me the second you find anything, no matter what!" David nodded solemnly and then kissed his wife on the forehead.

"Thanks, Red," he smiled tightly at the tall brunette that all but cradled his wife in her arms steering her back towards her mustang.
Henry looked much smaller than Snow remembered him being just yesterday as he sat at the counter of Granny's diner and read a comic book. A tale of truth and justice, good and evil had forever been his favorite. He looked up when the women approached and knew instinctively they had no news for him. Without a word, he pursed his lips together and hung his head. A gesture that reminded Snow of her daughter through and through. "It will be okay Henry," the brunette to her side finally said. "Your grandpa is going to organize a search party to find them, okay kid?"

"So they are definitely not in the mine?" he asked without looking up.

"I... I..." Snow's lip trembled, and she shook her head at her inability to soothe the child before her.

"We don't think so kid, but they are still looking," Ruby finished for her. 'Come on grab your stuff, and I'll take you and Grandma back to the loft to get some sleep okay?' Henry nodded and slid off the stool he had been sitting on and went into the back to grab his overnight bag.

"Thanks, Red, I just... I don't know how to..." Snow looked up into sorrowful green eyes, "I've never been anyone's mother before! Let alone a grandmother! I don't know how to tell him his moms might be..."

"That isn't what we are telling him because we don't know that." Ruby squared the smaller brunette's shoulders and looked her in the eye and said, "We only tell him what we know Snow. Anything else will just upset him for no reason."

"You're right. Of course, you're right." She shook her head at herself and wiped the tears that fell. "You are going to be a wonderful mother someday," the pixie-haired woman commented with a sad smile.

"What and wreck the perfection that is this body? No thanks! I'll settle for being the rockin cool auntie to your brood, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind at all," Snow said sadly and allowed herself to be wrapped in the taller woman's arms.

Henry ran out from the back of the diner, bag over his shoulder, and reached out to grab Snow's hand. His hands were almost as big as her own and he stood as tall as she was as well. He looked at her with his hazel eyes and said, "If they are not in the collapsed mine Grandma, then they're fine. My moms take care of each other. They've both promised me that they would always take care of one another. Everything is going to be fine. We'll find them. It's what we do," he concluded with a smirk.

Snow let out a little sob and reached for her grandson and pulled him into her. "When did you get so grown up Henry?"

"Somewhere between Peter Pan and the Snow Queen, I think," he replied with a smirk making both brunettes laugh. "So when grandpa organizes the search party, can I go help? Sitting around since yesterday is making me kind of stir crazy."

"Sure kid," Ruby answered for Snow who was still holding him tight as if she were to let him go, their entire world would collapse around them. "For now though, let's go home," she said patting Snow White on the back gently.

The next few days not much has changed with Mayor Mills; she's peacefully slept next to the fire, with her faithful sheriff by her side.
Emma started to eat a bit more as the days wore on, and they managed to get both broth and water into Regina, albeit not much. "Something is better than nothing," Xena encouraged as Emma used a hollowed reed, as if it were a straw, to feed drops of nourishment into her friend little by little. In the first days, Xena trekked back to the village to acquire medical supplies, but the healer in town had been cleaned out. So she improvised.

Everything they did made the Queen stronger. She was warmer on her own without Emma's body to help regulate her, her breathing was deeper, and her heart pounded much stronger than before. Xena was pleased with her progress, enough so, to consider building a sled to carry the unconscious woman to the Amazon village. She let Gabrielle break it to Emma that Xena felt Regina was strong enough to be moved.

"No way!"

This wasn't starting out good. The bard held up her hands and urged, "Emma, hear me out."

"No! She needs rest, she's in a coma or something, and coma patients are in hospital beds, hooked up to monitors and shit, they are not dragged across the countryside behind a friggin horse!"

"Emma, I don't understand…" she started, "but I can see you are passionate about your point of view, let me ask you though, do they leave these coma patients out in the middle of the woods, exposed to the elements?"

"No," Emma said carefully, she was frightened and didn't want to take chances. Regina was getting stronger, Xena said so. What if they moved her and she started to get worse!?

"The Amazons have medicines. They have libraries of information we can find out what Malik used and see if there is an antidote." When Emma closed her eyes, Gabrielle knew she won but didn't relish in the win, Emma was clearly shaken and needed her. She took a tentative step closer and lowered her voice to a soothing tone, as if approaching a wild animal, "Listen, sweetie, I know you are afraid, I don't want anything to happen to her either, we just want what is best for Regina, I know you want that. Xena won't have the sled made for another day, that's one more day Regina has to get that much stronger. I promise you, I won't let anything happen to your queen."

Emma pursed pale, thin lips and relented to the well-spoken queen with a silent nod. She knew when she's lost an argument. She lost plenty to her own queen back home. "We are lucky the weather has held out as long as it has," she thought out loud looking down at her sleeping beauty.

Gabrielle put her hand on Emma's shoulder, "Come on, let's start dinner."

Emma looked up at the sky then back down at the sleeping queen, the past few days she's held everything in, and it all started to crash down on her, "I need… um…" Gabrielle nodded in understanding, "Go ahead, Emma. I'll stay with her."

Emma grabbed her sword and walked out in the direction of the river. Gabrielle's heart sank as she watched the leather-clad woman walk into the woods. She knew exactly how the Sheriff was feeling, looking down at Regina's peaceful features, she remembered her first run-in with Callisto.

Callisto was a sociopath who grew up to hate the Destroyer of Nations. Xena's army had burned the young girl's village to the ground, and the inhabitants were so afraid of the invading army they refused to come out of their homes, even as they burned around them. It was one of the few times that Xena's army was responsible for killing women and children and Callisto's parents and sister were among the dead. The young blonde six-year-old girl narrowly escaped with her life, but not her soul. Her humanity was destroyed that day as she listened to her family burn, the screams of her
sister drove the girl to sheer madness. As a result, she grew up with one thing on her mind. Xena: Warrior Princess.

Their first run-in with the blonde lunatic had been a stealth attack and damn near killed the brunette warrior. For a time, Gabrielle thought her friend was indeed dead. The helplessness the bard felt as she watched the woman she loved deteriorate over mere hours and then seeing her lifeless body sent her over the edge. In order to come back and stand tall and do what needed to be done, Gabrielle did what Emma is now doing. She ran out into the woods and took her frustrations out on the plant life.

The bard sat next to Regina close to the fire, and began slicing dried vegetables into the charred pot of water, she spoke gently to the sleeping queen about her and Xena's adventures.

Emma briskly walked for several minutes then broke out into a jog. The crisp air that filled her lungs did much to make her feel renewed and alive. Thoughts of Regina cascaded over her, flooding her senses with images of the woman and Emma pushed from a jog into a run.

Tears were stinging her eyes and she pushed the run harder till her muscles burned from the strain and her lungs were on fire sucking not quite enough air. Emma slowed her pace then fell to her knees letting out a guttural cry of sorrow and frustration. The potential for loss took its toll on her, and she sagged forward gasping for air. Emma laid on the ground for quite a while, and exhaustion took over her.

"What do I have to do to get you to leave me alone Swan? Go. Away."

"I'm an idiot."

"Finally! Something we can agree on."

"I'm an idiot because I've been down this road before."

"Irritating me? Yes, you have!"

"No, when I was a kid. Someone came into my life for a while, and I thought... we were going to be best friends, but this girl lied to me and I pushed her away because of that lie, and she asked me to forgive her, but I never did. It took some time, but I realized that was a mistake and I regretted the decision. But by then it was too late the damage was already done. I don't want to make the same mistake again, Regina. Living in Storybrooke, I've got my son and my parents, and I love them, but they can't always understand me. They don't know what it feels like to be rejected and misunderstood, not the way I do, not the way YOU do. And somehow that makes us, I don't know, unique, or maybe even special! I wasn't looking for you to assuage my guilt. I was just looking for you to be my friend."

"You thought we were friends?"

"Crazy right? But... I thought it could be... that it was possible... I'm not gonna stop trying... even if you still want to kill me."

"Emma... Wait... I don't... want... to kill you..."

"See? That's a start!"

"How long has it been?" Xena asked with a worried look. Gabrielle pulled away from their
embrace and looked up with utter guilt in her eyes, "I don't... um... A while, I was talking to Regina, telling her stories and making dinner." Xena reached out resting both of her hands on either side of the bard's head forcing her to look up into her eyes. "Look, Emma is upset, and you probably couldn't have stopped her from leaving, so stop with the look. This isn't your fault, and I'll find her."

"What look? I don't have a look!" Gabrielle snapped sounding offended.

A crooked smile greeted the bard, "You do. It is going to be okay. I promise."

"I... I just know how she feels... when... when Callisto..." the bard started, but emotion choked her momentum.

"Shhhh...I know my bard. Which way did she head? I'll see if I can catch up to her before it gets too dark."

Gabrielle pointed towards the river with a shaky hand, "But I don't know which way she went after hitting the water."

Xena pulled her love close and laid a kiss upon her forehead, "Stay here, keep talking to Regina, she can hear you. I did." With one final pat to the shoulder, Xena was off following Emma's trail.

It didn't take long for Xena to catch up with the Savior and found her huddled in a ball on the forest floor. Xena's heart broke imagining Gabrielle in the same state and knew all too well what Emma was going through. She bent down and put her hand on Emma's arm; the girl was asleep, her tear stained face still damp from her sorrow. Xena slid her arms behind her head and under her knees and lifted her up and carried her back to camp. The girl did not rouse from unconsciousness during the walk back, and Xena whispered to her, reassuring her that all would be okay, "We'll find a way."

Back at camp, Gabrielle started the task of breaking up soft branches from the variety of trees in the area, laying them over the wooden bed that would carry Regina the rest of the way to the Amazon village. She scooped up a hearty arm full of soft leaves and matted down grasses mixing it in with the young, thin branches. She covered the entire sled with a large cloth, tucking in the edges to keep the makeshift mattress together. She pushed down the center of the bed and then stood back pleased with her work. She heard someone approaching, and grabbed her staff weapon. She instinctively stood between Regina and the soft footsteps she heard.

When she saw Xena carrying Emma, she ran over to her in a panic. "What happened? Is she okay? Gods Xena! I shouldn't have let her go!" Xena grimaced with strain and then set the blonde down near Regina. "She is okay. The stress of all this," waving her hands over Regina, "has our little Sheriff overwhelmed a bit."

"No," Xena replied. "Just, no." She took Gabrielle into her arms and squeezed her tight. "No," she repeated, more for her own sake than the blonde.

Emma slept through the night, her body in desperate need of rest. The stresses of the previous week had sapped her reserves. She awoke at first light, confused at first about where she was, but then saw Regina laying on the stretcher. Everything came rushing back causing her to purse her lips
together tight to fight back the sob she had creeping up her throat.

Xena had all but packed up their gear. She walked back from hitching Regina up to Argo and woke Gabrielle from her much deserved sleep.

Emma sat up still looking over at Regina and asked, "She'll be okay on that right? I mean, I'm sure you know how to… uh…" desperation shown in her eyes as she stumbled to articulate her fears.

Xena crouched down next to her sleeping bard, "Yes Emma, we'll take good care of the Queen." She nudged Gabrielle gently with a smile on her face. The smile was more to calm Emma than it was to show her actual feelings, truth be told, she's worried about Regina, not that she will die, but that she just won't wake up and Xena knew, Emma won't ever leave her, won't ever move on, won't ever give up on her queen. She wouldn't.

They ate breakfast in virtual silence, cleaned up and finished packing Argo. They were on the road within an hour of Xena waking Emma. The Sheriff walked alongside Xena who led Argo in a brisk and steady pace, unable to face the stillness of Regina for a time. Gabrielle hung back talking through an adventure she was working on to her captive audience. Xena looked over at Emma, "You okay?" Emma didn't meet her glance and simply replied, "No."

They walk for a bit in silence, then Xena said, "Tell me about Henry?" Emma looked at her and softened her scowl as she remembered her son. "He is amazing. He is smart, so very smart. She raised him so much better… I… I just don't know where I'd be without him." She was smiling, but there was a pang of sadness in her eyes. "He found me, on my 28th birthday."

"Oh?" Xena probed.

"Yeah, I made a wish on my cupcake candle that I wouldn't be alone and then some kid knocks on my door and changes my entire life." She smiled wide holding in the wave of emotion. "Now I have my parents, my son… and… m-my fa-fa-family." The wave crested and she started to choke up with tears that ran down her cheeks.

"Regina is who you mean?" Xena pushed. Emma laughed and sniffled, "Yeah. We had a rough start, but I consider her… my best friend. No one understands me quite like Regina does. Despite everything, she has worked so hard to be better."

Xena put her hand on the smaller blonde's shoulders and gave her a squeeze. "It'll be okay Emma." Her heart ached for this woman and her plight. She was uncertain about the outcome, but she would do everything in her power to fix this for the women.

"So, may I ask you a question, Xena? It is kind of personal."

Xena lifted a brow in response and tentatively drawled, "Suuuuure?"

"When did you know? I mean, about you and Gabrielle? How did you know if it was, what she wanted? The scrolls that are told in my world didn't have you two… together… I mean, you were friends but not, lovers."

Xena couldn't hide the shock that crossed her face, "Really? I mean, I guess the stories Gabrielle tells are more focused on the action, the rest can get lost, but… just friends? Really?"

Emma smirked. "Yeah well, I mean, there is a whole subtext thing, and I think most people realize…" Xena rolled her eyes, and Emma continued as her cheeks turned pink, "At least I did."
Xena swallowed another mouthful of water and chuckled. "Well to answer your question, I knew for sure after an accident I had, it left me near death and Gabrielle did everything she could to save me. While I was unconscious, I could hear her begging me to come back to her. I knew I felt…” she looked away, "more… for her before that, but that was when I realized she felt the same way for me."

Emma's eyes dart back to the sleigh being dragged quickly then swallowed hard, "Oh."

Xena said, "How long have you known you were in love with her?"

Emma rubbed the back of her neck with her hand and looked down. "I think I… I don't know."

"But you know now, don't you?" Xena pushed.

"Yeah. It's complicated," Emma said quietly. "I-I don't… I mean, it's hard for me to… um… a-an- and if sh-she doesn't… it would ruin… well, it isn't just about me, our son, it would be hard on him… If w-we went back to…a-and I would rather die than hurt Henry."

Xena smirked, "Henry."

Emma scrunched up her eyebrows in a pleading manner in hopes that Xena would just understand. Understand that she is afraid of losing Regina in any capacity. Xena nodded and shrugged her shoulders a bit, "Your son sounds like a strong kid. He would probably want his mothers to be happy, no matter the risk." Emma knew she was right; Henry would adjust. He loved the Swan-Mills family when it is just the three of them; he being the center of both of his mother's unyielding, undying attention. Emma replied, "Yeah. He would love it."
They stopped that night to make camp, Emma tended to Regina, getting fluid into her and a bit of broth from the stew they had for dinner. After things were settled Emma asked Xena to help her do sword drills, and with a crazed smile and a twinkle in her eye Xena adamantly accepted, "I LOVE swordplay!"

Gabrielle laughed, "No one would ever guess it, honey."

Emma was suddenly unsure of herself and mentioned that she was just a beginner, "I… uh…take it easy on me huh?"

"Grab Regina's bow, we can warm up with some agility drills," Xena suggested.

"I don't really know how to use this thing," Emma replied but still grabbed the weapon.

"That's okay, I'll show you. Longbow is super fun!" Xena said with a sparkle in her eye.

"When she says fun, she means deadly!" Gabrielle called after the women and Emma chuckled for the first time in days.

The two women came back to camp a couple of hours later, covered in perspiration, laughing over a story Xena was telling Emma, "...and then she was orchestrating an opera with the rocks in the cave!" Xena busted out laughing. Emma shook her head knowing exactly the episode she was talking about.

"The nut bread incident?" Gabrielle rolled her eyes. "Really guys? I was poisoned!"

Xena plopped down next to the bard and kissed her neck. "Yeah, it was painfully cute sweetheart."

Gabrielle scrunched up her nose and with a wicked grin, "Lest we forget my warrior, I record every moment of your life for posterity." She waggled her eyebrows teasingly.

Emma set her sword down along with her jovial mood then made her way over to Regina. She felt regret that the woman was missing out on this experience with her, if not still upset the woman was still in harm's way. She brushed a strand of dark hair away from her all too still face then bent down and whispered, "Regina. If you can hear me. Please. Please come back to me. I need you."

She left a chaste kiss upon the woman's cheek a single tear rolled down her own she pulled back and got ready to go to sleep.

The group of women settled into a routine for the remainder of the trip and made good time. The last night of their journey they didn't make camp, but just stopped to attend to Argo and have a bit of dinner, then went back out on the road coming into the Amazon village a couple of hours before dawn. They were greeted by patrols on the outskirts and were chaperoned in. A scout was sent ahead to inform the regent Ephiny and wake the healer, Magdalus.

As they entered the central part of the village, Ephiny came running up to greet them. She excitedly scooped up Gabrielle into a fierce hug. The woman pressed her full body against the bard, her hand clasping the back of her head and the other the small of her back. Gabrielle seemed to hold fast to the wiry curly blonde as tightly as she was being held. When they separated the Amazon gave Xena a firm handshake, it seemed cooler than it actually was, Emma saw in the
woman's dark eyes, respect and love of the deep friendship she had with Xena. Gabrielle introduced Emma and Ephiny's curly blonde head nodded at Emma's small wave.

Xena gave a quick summary of the situation and then lifted Regina and carried her to the healer's hut. Emma followed closely, feeling very uneasy all of a sudden. The whole place was surreal, she closed her eyes briefly to summon her inner savior and then listened carefully to the healer as she discussed treatments with Xena, who nodded in agreement. Emma didn't understand everything the woman said but trusted Xena.

After examining Regina, the woman spoke, addressing Gabrielle, "My Queen, the girl is lost and cannot find her way back. We need to find out exactly what poison was used. If there is a way to reverse the effects, it will be in the archives." Gabrielle nodded, "Thank you, Maggie." She took her subject's hand and squeezed her appreciation then looked to her friends. "That would be my queue. Xena why don't you take Emma and…"

"I'm staying here," Emma interrupted. She walked over to Regina's side and knelt down next to the cot the woman was on. She pulled the cotton blanket up over the brunette and took her hand.

"Alright," the bard conceded knowing it was useless to argue the need for rest to Emma. "Xena, would you mind going to the mess tent and getting us all some breakfast? If she isn't going to rest, she at least needs to keep up her strength by eating."

Xena nodded in agreement then the Queen informed, "I'm going to check out the archives, see if I can find the poison, hopefully, it is native to the area, and we can find an antidote." Emma had Regina's hand in both of hers, holding it up to her cheek as she had done for hours on end, every night, during their trip into the village. Gabrielle patted Regina on her arm and looked at Emma and said, "We'll get her back." Then turned on her heel and walked out of the tent.

Gabrielle looked through hundreds of scrolls searching for symptoms and availability in the area. After hours she was looking at the pile of scrolls she hadn't yet gone through, it was getting painfully small, and she was starting to think that maybe the poison was from outside their area. She sighed loudly thinking that she would go through the scrolls again but wasn't looking forward to it. Her head was starting to pound, and it was becoming more difficult to focus.

Ephiny entered the archive hut with a plate of food and a mug of ale. "Thought you could use a break." Gabrielle smiled at the act of kindness, "Thank you Eph."

Ephiny slid into a chair next to the Queen and asked, "So, how's it going?" Gabrielle sighed much louder than intended. "It's slow going. We searched the area but didn't find any ruminants of where he concocted the poison, so I don't have any visual characteristics. Basically, I'm basing my search on the symptoms alone." Ephiny contemplated this and nodded. Gabrielle continued, "Regina took a double dose, the attacker seemed to have covered the tips of the darts several times, there's a thick layer still on the tips." She didn't use the man's name for fear of upsetting her first in command. Ephiny was fiercely protective of her queen, and Gabrielle didn't want to tell her that Xena knew the man and it was just another case of them being in danger because of Xena's past. More so to avoid the argument they would no doubt have.

Ephiny looked skeptical, "So you don't know why this guy attacked you? She picked up the toasted bread and chewed slower than normal as she stalled for an answer. "No. It was probably a slaver though. Emma and Regina were dressed like I was, and as you know, Amazon's fetch a good price on the market."

Seemingly to accept the answer Ephiny bit the inside of her cheek, "So are they new recruits? Or?"
Gabrielle shook her head then as she finished her late lunch, she summed up Emma's amazing story. Ephiny listened with her brow furrowed with intensity as she took it all in. "We saw this silver and indigo cyclone off in the distance, it appeared and disappeared so fast Eph, it was phenomenal."

Ephiny knew the bard had more of an imagination than she herself possessed, but the woman wasn't a liar. She believed that Gabrielle believed, and that was good enough for her. "Okay then. I'll let you get back to it." She placed a hand on the bard's shoulder, "I'm glad you are here. We've missed you."

Gabrielle, knowing full well she meant I've missed you and not we've missed you, smiled and said, "I've missed you too Ephiny." She covered her friend's hand with her own and gave her a knowing pat. Ephiny turned and left the bard to finish her research.

Xena brought the Sheriff some porridge from the mess tent, and by the time she got back, Emma was fast asleep kneeling next to Regina as she has been for the last week. Xena set the bowl down on the side table and checked Regina's vitals, "Still strong little one." She attempted to move around Emma to lift her into the bed next to her unconscious friend when Gabrielle burst in, "XENA! I think I've found it!" Xena pushed her finger to her own lips and directed the excited bard outside, leaving Emma to sleep on the floor of the hut.

Gabrielle could hardly contain her excitement while she explained, "And it's close! We could be there and back in three days!" Xena took in the information, the mineral Gabrielle spoke of was known to her and could do some miraculous things, "It just might work, great job Gabrielle. We should probably wake Em…"

The bard touched her forearm, "No. Let her sleep. I've given instruction to Eponin to cater to Emma's needs, and although I know, she won't use it, set up a hut nearby for her to sleep in. Maggie has also been instructed to let her stay in the hospice for now." Xena looked troubled, "She won't be happy we've left without her." Gabrielle looked thoughtful, "Well it is an impossible decision, help us where we are fully capable or stay with her queen. I'll be glad to take the fall for the decision, Xena, if you are afraid of the Sheriff's wrath." The bard threw a teasing smile and a wink as Xena scrunched up her nose.

"Fine. Let's get going."
Chapter 12

Xena and Gabrielle rode through the first night and all of the next day reaching the spring in record
time, they had brought with them several containers to dredge up the mineral sediment from the
bottom of the spring. Xena didn't know how much of it they would need but to make the antidote,
they would boil it down. So they brought four large jars filling them to the brim while Gabrielle
made a light camp. Gabrielle brought the recipe for the mineral and put the jars on flat stones that
surrounded the fire so it will cook down, Xena added herbs that would act as a catalyst and stirred
each jar with a birch twig.

They settled down for a few hours while the concoction cooked. "You want to hear about
Rumpelstiltskin? Emma said he is her son's grandfather," the bard asked quietly and snuggled into
Xena's powerful arms.

Xena laughed, "Of course he is, I've heard the story, but never by you my bard. So does this start
with 'Once Upon a Time'?

Gabrielle laughed, "Of course it does. Once Upon a Time… There was a cowardly man who lost
his wife to a villainous pirate… He felt helpless and powerless, and when his son was in danger, he
took on a wizard's power and became The Dark One in order to save him. The darkness corrupted
his soul, and he ended up losing his son anyway. Legend says he could see the future and bend it to
his will and has been searching for a way to get his son back for a millennia." Xena settled back
and listened to the rest of the story.

Emma lifted her head and her neck popped under her stiff muscles. There was a very tall, very
muscular brunette Amazon standing in the doorway leading to the semi-private room in the back of
the hut. Emma cleared her throat, and the Amazon turned to her. "My name is Eponin. I have been
accosted by the Queen to attend to your needs or defend you if the need arises, you are under my
care, if you need anything, please ask Your Highness."

Emma couldn't help her mouth drop as the woman started speaking, "Holy crap, you are a real live
Amazon!"

Eponin maintained her stoic stance, "Yes, Your Highness."

Emma struggled to stand, stretching her muscles tense from sitting on the floor all day. She caught
the term the second time around and asked with a brow furrow, "What is with the Highness crap?"

Eponin's eyes flicked about, "Queen Gabrielle mentioned you were a Princess, Your Highness."

Emma laughed a little, "I suppose I am, but I'm not used to people treating me like royalty. Emma
is fine." She held out her hand to the warrior and was surprised when the woman firmly grasped
her forearm. "Amazon handshake. Cool."

She shook herself from amazement then noticed it was dark, almost on cue her stomach growled
loudly. She smiled as Eponin broke her stone attention stance and smiled. "I suppose dinner, would
be to your liking? Your Highh.. uh… Emma ?" Emma looked down at Regina, and her stomach
growled again as if to answer for her.

"Okay okay, monster! Yes. Please." She laughed, "Eponin right?" Eponin nodded a short salute.
Emma then strode toward the exit and informed the healer she would be going to the mess.
Once they were outside, she got light headed, and instinctively Eponin grabbed her about the waist. "Easy does it, Emma."

Emma blushed a bit as she noticed Eponin's muscles flex, she smiled, "You're an Amazon!"

Eponin just laughed, "let's get to the tent and get some food in you." Emma, with a sheepish smile, simply nodded.

The warrior went behind the serving area and got the plate down off of the warming stone for Emma. "You didn't eat the porridge Xena brought for you this afternoon, so our Queen set aside dinner for you."

Emma dug in, the meat was sweet with some sort of gravy and what tasted like mashed potatoes but were orange, and something passable for green beans. "So where are the girls?"

The Amazon Queen mentioned that the Sheriff could get upset at Xena and Gabrielle's absence. Eponin equated upset with anger, so she was careful with her words. "Ok," she started slowly, "They went to go get an ingredient for the potion to help your friend. It is nearby, and they will be home tomorrow night."

Emma stiffened, and hope sparkled in her eyes when she whispered, "They found something that will help?"

Eponin nodded. Emma came undone, covering her face as she silently wept. Eponin had prepared for Emma to be angry they left without her, not crying. Queen Gabrielle said angry, not crying! Wincing, she offered, "Um… is there anything you need?"

Emma sniffled and in a small voice said, "No. Wait… why didn't they wake me? Where did they go?" She had stopped eating altogether and was looking more what Eponin considered the proper emotion, anger.

"Our Queen left instructions for you to be taken care of, but not disturbed." Seeing the confusion in the blonde's eyes she softened and reached over the table to touch her hand, "You seemed like you needed the sleep." Emma accepted that and started eating again, her mind spinning with questions the warrior didn't seem to have the answers to.

"Tomorrow night. I get her back tomorrow, and I'll never let her go again."

Eponin informed Emma that there were sleeping accommodations arranged for her, but she could stay with Regina if that is what she wanted. "Either way, I'll stay with you."

"That makes me feel better, Eponin, thank you," she finished up her dinner and expressed the desire to return to the healer's hut.

"Absolutely, Emma. However, if you have the need, the Queen has made her personal bath available to you, it is backed to a heated spring and is quite spectacular." Emma thought about that for a moment and realized she probably could stand a bath but was hoping the offer wasn't a hint in that direction. "Okay, a bath sounds good. Let's do it."

Emma was led to where the Queen's quarters were, grabbed a bundle that Gabrielle left for Emma consisting of several large fluffy towels and clothes to sleep in. Behind the queen's hut was the cave to her majesty's personal bath, the air was cold and as Eponin lit several torches that lined the walls the steam lit up a misty white fog rolling off the in-ground pool. There were petals along the top of the water and the air smelled of lavender and spice.
Emma gasped and turned to Eponin, "This place is incredible!" and Eponin chuckled.

"I'll be outside the door if you need anything."

Emma nodded and thanked her. Once the warrior was gone, she got undressed and slid into the hot water. She ahh'd her way down into the silky heat. She laid back dipping her head under. This was definitely better than the rinse off she had in that cold river the other day.

Why the hell the girls would ever leave this place is beyond me.

Although she enjoyed the relaxing bath, she made quick work of it, eager to get back to Regina. She dressed in the short shift Gabrielle left and a pair of what looked like boy shorts. She snickered to herself, "That is so awesome. Amazon undies." She gathered up her Amazon garb and left the bathhouse.

When Emma was finished, Eponin directed them back towards the healer's hut. They walked in silence, Eponin wasn't a big chit chatter, and Emma didn't know what to say, but it wasn't an awkward silence, just peaceful.

When they entered the hut Eponin offered to take Emma's clothes to be cleaned by the launders, Emma asked if they could take Regina's as well, not really knowing where Regina's clothes went off to. She was dressed in a similar shift to what Emma had on; they changed her that first night after the brunette lost consciousness. Emma knew they couldn't leave her in the binding leather she was wearing but felt wrong and dirty as she and Gabrielle undressed the unconscious woman.

"I'm not sure where her stuff is, maybe Xena still has it in Argo's pack?"

Eponin looked thoughtfully, "Knowing my Queen, it is probably already been laundered and in your hut."

Emma nodded knowingly, Gabrielle certainly did think of everything. Eponin took Emma's clothes and did a short salute and said, "I'll return in a moment to stand guard, Your Highness." Then turned and left.

"It's just Emma," the blonde said to an empty room. She dropped her arms down to her sides and turned to sit next to Regina. She again picked up the woman's hand, her perfectly manicured painted nails made Emma smile. She began to speak before she even realized she was.

"Regina I'm back. Dinner was good. You would have loved it. Their potatoes are orange! Xena and Gabrielle found something that will hopefully help you, so you just rest for now okay? This whole mess will be over soon, and we will go back to Storybrooke and be okay. Henry is going to be so happy to see you, and I bet he is leading David and Mary Margaret on a new operation to find us right this minute." She smiled thinking of her son and what he would name the op to find his mother's. "So you just rest R'gina, I got your back. Always." Her thoughts led to times when the Snow Queen had frozen Marian and the pain that caused Regina. Emma closed her eyes at the memory.

"Miss Swan, one thing is abundantly clear, you've NEVER had my back… and you never will."

Pushing the words that were spoken in hurt and betrayal aside, Emma continued filling in Regina of the plan, as far as she knew it. "So, the girls, they will get the stuff that is going to help snap you out of this. It will be okay. Everything will be okay. We will go back to how it was and everything will be okay again," she said quietly, uncertain which of them she was reassuring.

The one whose name is not mentioned came to her mind. "H-hook," she whispered. "I never told
you why I did what I did to him." Emma took a deep breath and rested her forehead against the cool hand of the queen, drawing her strength. "He loved me, when we first got together, I know he loved me. I couldn't love him back. I mean I tried, I did, because I thought I would, one day and you were…"

She looked at the peaceful face of her friend and couldn't help when the scene blurred in her upset, "I didn't think I had any other option. I didn't have any other option. Then when Robin left, things got crazy with our lives, and then the darkness came after you." Emma recalled that terrifying night the dark one's evil went after Regina, and she brushed aside tears from her cheeks. "We were all in Camelot because of me. He was going to die because of me!" She shook her head at the memories as if they weren't the truth she knew them to be. "His love for me got him killed, how could I not try and save him?"

She set down the Queen's hand over her abdomen and sat back as if admitting fault on this would turn the world against her. "I should have known he would turn dark. I should have known better, I'm sorry."

"Perhaps if I had been strong enough, I would have broken his heart instead of leading him to his death. Perhaps if I'd been strong enough, I would have told you when I got back from New York that…"

_She is unconscious. She is poisoned, she can't hear you._

She huffed at herself. _She's asleep Swan!_

"But… you were with Robin. I saw how happy you were and… and… so I stayed with him. I was selfish. I thought if you were happy, I could be too. Until Marian."

A tear rolled down her already streaked face. "I know you thought I betrayed you, but really, I would never, _ever_ hurt you like that. Our friendship took a hit that day and then again after Hook, and I know you forgave me, but I have never forgiven myself. For any of it. I almost lost you and Hen because of my cowardice." She sniffled back her tears, cleared her throat and continued, "I couldn't lose you then, and I can not now. All you gotta do is come back to me, Regina. Come back to me, and we'll go home, and everything will go back to normal." She lifted Regina's fingers to her lips and then bowed her head squeezing her eyes closed.

After she was silent for several moments a soft knock on the wall grabbed her attention. It was Eponin with a sheepish grin.

"You heard that, huh?" Emma twisted her mouth to the side and blushed.

"No Your Highness, well… not all of it, I heard you speaking and returned to my post." Emma smiled tightly at the use of status once again.

_I'll never get used to that._

"Are you sleeping here then?" Eponin asked knowingly.

"Yeah, but I can't do another night on the floor. I'll grab the cot next to her. Maybe I can push it closer? I feel better if I can touch her." Eponin nodded and moved the light cot right next to the sleeping queen. "There you go. If you need anything else, don't hesitate to call for me Your Highn… Emma," she corrected remembering Emma's awkwardness of her title.

"Will do Eponin. Thank you again." With a curt nod and the little Amazon salute, the woman returned to her station outside. Emma crawled into the cot next to Regina grabbing the queen's
hand in her own, "Good night Your Majesty." She closed her eyes and slept hard, well into the next day.

Xena let Gabrielle sleep while she made up the solution that was required to make the antidote. The paste that was created within the jars had settled, and along the top, there was a thin oil like substance she was able to skim off into another smaller jar. It appeared the amount they were able to extract from the four jars were sufficient to make four doses of the antidote. She figured better to have too much than too little, then stowed the sealed jar in Argo's bag. She cleaned up their camp, packed their gear and woke up Gabrielle.

"I'm up," the bard mumbled sleepily. "Did we get what we need?" she asked, her eyes still closed. "Yup. If we leave now, we could be back by the afternoon. "Okay okay okay, I'm up for real this time." Xena took the jars down to the spring and filled them with more mineral from the bottom.

_Just in case._

Gabrielle met her down by the water's edge with both horses ready to go. "Do you think we will need more?" she asked.

"No, but I just have a feeling this isn't going to be as smooth as we think."

Gabrielle laughed, "Seriously? When is anything?"

They rode through the night, and mid-morning stopped to care for the animals. Once watered, fed and rested they made good time making it back to Amazon country by mid-afternoon.

Emma was already up and was sitting with Regina when they got back. Gabrielle entered the healer's hut, Emma jumped up and ran over to her wrapping her arms around the bard. "Seriously? Couldn't you say goodbye? Fill me in, what is this stuff? How do we administer it? What is it going to do? Tell me everything!"

Gabrielle rubbed Emma's back and pulled away looking her in the eye. "Listen, don't get your hopes up, this is just a shot in the dark, but the most likely candidate for an antidote. Xena is mixing up a batch right now, and we were able to prepare the mineral while we rested yesterday evening. It's a binding agent that once introduced into the body will adhere and hopefully," she stressed again, "Hopefully, it will reverse the effects. She has been under quite a while, but with a little luck, this should work."

Emma reined in her emotions knowing the cautionary words Gabrielle spoke were truth. "Okay," she said tentatively. "You're right. Is there anything I can do?" Gabrielle shook her head and walked over to the side of the bed where they had Regina, she looked drained. Emma could see the stress of the last week had taken its toll on the blonde Queen as well.

"No, I mean if you want to go ask Xena she is in my personal quarters working. I'll stay here with her." She sat next to the bed on Emma's stool. "Yeah, I think I'd like that. Thanks, Gabrielle. For everything." The bard looked exhausted, Emma surmised they must have only had a few hours sleep in the last few days. "You should probably sleep though. You look like you could use it." The bard smiled, "I'll lay down on your cot in here, I don't want her to be alone." Emma nodded and retreated towards the Queen's quarters.
Chapter 13

"Xena?" The warrior heard a soft knock at the door as it opened, Emma poked her head in. The warrior was hunched over a table with vials and pouches of ingredients strewn across the top. Xena focused on sucking up a small bit of some black oily liquid from one vial and depositing it into another. The black color dissipated into a gray tone and started to fog up the top of the glass vial. Xena's features softened from her hard focused look to one of being pleased with the results. Emma cleared her throat. "Hi," she said sheepishly, "Is that the medicine?"

Xena nodded without looking up from her work.

"It's our best chance of getting her back." Xena sounded more optimistic than Gabrielle was and Emma figured the bard was preparing her for worst case scenario.

Emma smiled wide at the hope in Xena's features. "It's gotta work," she said definitively then asked, "How do we use it?" Xena stood and grabbed a waterskin, she emptied the contents of the vial into the water skin then attached a plunger with a hose attached, at the other end of the hose was a thin reed.

"Holy crap! That's an Amazon IV isn't it?" Emma had been utterly amazed at the technology the Xenaverse used, most of which was very similar to the stuff that was familiar, in a rustic twine and tree bark kind of way.

Xena shrugged, "I'm going to go ahead and say, yes? We insert this end into Regina's vein, and her bloodstream carries the antidote throughout her body. Maggie has been giving her fluids and nutrients this way since we got here. How is she?" Emma hadn't noticed the IV, but there was much about the room she didn't check out and to be fair she had slept more in the last few days then she had in a long, long while. "She isn't worse. I've been asleep," Emma shrugged.

Xena nodded, "You needed it. Come on let's go get this crud in her."

They made it back to the healer tent, and Gabrielle was asleep on the cot next to Regina. Xena mentioned on the walk over it may take some time for the effects to affect Regina so when they got into the hut she swapped out the IV that was giving her fluids with the one with the antidote. "Now we wait," she whispered.

As if on queue, once again, Emma's stomach growled. "I'm going to go get something to eat and bring it back here, why don't you get some sleep? You two," nodding over at the bard, "really could use it."

Xena nodded in exhausted agreement, placed a hand on Emma's shoulder and squeezed. "Wake me if there is any change." Emma crashed into Xena and hugged her tightly. "Thank you."

The warrior, not entirely comfortable with unsolicited intrusive intimacy patted Emma on the head awkwardly. "Let me know if anything changes with our queen."

Emma followed Xena out of the hut only to be greeted by Eponin who dutifully saluted Xena as she walked by. She had with her a plate full of food. Emma smiled wide, "Is that for me?" Eponin nodded, "I assumed the monster would need his tribute right about now." Emma laughed, "Thank you Eponin! Really, I… just… thank you."

After the late lunch, Emma returned to her vigil next to her queen. Several hours passed, and
Emma still had Regina's slim hand clasped in between her own when suddenly she felt a twitch. Emma who had been deep in thought about the oddities and the similarities of this universe snapped to attention. A soft groan came from Regina, and she moved her head just a bit. "Eponin! Get Xena!" Emma yelled. Then turned her attention to the brunette and said much softer, "Regina? Don't try to move too much. You've been out for a week."

Regina tried to lick her lips, and her eyes fluttered open, blurry at first, but then the yellow fuzzy mess sharpened into a blonde woman sitting next to her. "Thirsty," she whispered hoarsely. Emma had a mug of water next to the bed for herself and helped the woman take a sip. "Small sips Regina. I know you'll want more, but keep them small." Emma held the back of Regina's head to help her not choke on the liquid as she tried to drink.

"Where am I?" she asked. Emma was smiling ear to ear through her tears; she was stroking the brunette's hair soothingly. "We are in the Amazon village, you were poisoned, and Xena and Gabrielle got medicine for you." Emma couldn't be happier until the chocolate brown eyes held confusion, "Who?"

A sinking feeling washed over her, but she tried to push the worry away by telling herself the woman had been through a lot and she would need a moment. That was until the next question that came from the Mayor's dry lips shocked her, "Where's mother?" Emma's eyes bulged, "Cora?"

Emma considered that perhaps she was having difficulty and asked, "What is the last thing you remember Regina?"

"I was in the study with Daddy and Mother said she arranged for me to have a riding lesson with Daniel. Is Daniel okay?" Fear struck the woman as the realization that she had been actually poisoned swept over her. "Where is he?" she was distressed with concern for her love.

Emma's mind was reeling, and she swallowed hard putting her hand upon Regina's head and said, "Rest now, you were the only one poisoned. You don't know me, do you?" she asked just verifying her fears.

Regina shook her head, "No."

Emma helped her take some more water. "Okay, I'm Emma. I'm your friend. There seems to be something going on with your memory, and we are going to figure out how to fix it." Emma knew the fear was blazing in her own eyes, but the girl didn't seem to pick up on it and just nodded gently and sat back and relaxed.

Xena and Gabrielle came into the hut with wide smiles on their faces until they saw Emma's worry. Gabrielle was the one to vocalize concern, "What's wrong? Is she okay?" Emma nodded. "Can I see you guys outside?"

Regina looked almost frantic when she cried out, "No wait! Don't leave me, Emma! Please!" As if a blade sliced through her heart, Emma gasped. The girl tightly clutched her hand and looked up at her with pleading panicked eyes. "Okay, god, it's okay, I'll stay," she said and sat back down.

Emma looked at Xena when she spoke, carefully choosing her words. "Regina has no memory of me. Or of anything…. Recent." Emma swallowed and pushed her frantic freak out down as not to upset Regina.

Xena nodded, "Alright. She was out for a while. Her memories may come back on their own." Xena looked at Emma, "It is important we don't panic, her body is healing still, ridding itself of the poison."
Emma feverishly nodded, "Okay you're right. When can she eat?" Emma's mind started thinking of how they could heal her faster. Gabrielle piped in, "Broth. Later Emma. Water, now. She needs rest."

Gabrielle rested a hand on Regina's arm and spoke directly to her, "Are you in any pain honey? Are you warm enough? Can I get you anything?" Regina's features looked lost, almost timid, Gabrielle had never seen the woman look so much like a little girl, so vulnerable, and afraid.

"I'd like my mother. She has magic. She could help cure me." She looked up at Emma, "Did mother cure me?" Emma looked guilty, unsure of how to respond, how to tell her friend that her mother was dead.

No, that would be too much. Lie Swan.

"Cora... is away on a diplomatic... venture... for the crown. King... Leopold... was in need of her... expertise..."

Regina flinched at this strange news, wrinkling her brow as she contemplated the information, it wasn't something Mother has ever done before, but she was always trying to get in the royal's good graces. "And Daddy?" Emma looked up at Xena who held the weight of Emma's discomfort in lying to the Mayor written across her face, "He has accompanied her." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, "We are in a neighboring kingdom, I am your friend, you will be safe with me."

Regina seemed to accept this and asked for more water. Xena pulled out another blanket for Regina and whispered something to Gabrielle. "Rest. Let us know if you need anything." They turned to leave Xena holding the privacy sheet open for Gabrielle and looked back at a near panicked Emma. She nodded slightly with a tight smile and warm blue eyes. "Make sure she gets some rest."

Emma tucked Regina's hair behind her ear and spoke with her, "I'm right here okay? I'm not going anywhere. You are safe now," she said uncertain which of them she was reassuring. She brought the girl's hand to her lips and kissed the back gently and whispered, "You're back." The tears started to fall once again, and Regina rolled on her side, bringing her other hand up to wipe the tears away from the blonde's face. "You care for me, Emma?"

Emma chuckled softly. "Yes. Very much so, you are my family."

"May I have some more water please?" The girl's soft angelic voice a mere ghost of the Regina Mills Emma was familiar with. "Where are we?" the woman asked as their surroundings must be much stranger than younger Regina was accustomed to. "We are in an Amazon village. The blonde girl that was here before, Gabrielle, she is their Queen."

Regina's eyes widened at the idea of royalty coming to see her, her face flushed a deep red, "but, why was she..."

Emma smiled, "She is your friend as well Regina."

Regina didn't seem to take this information at face value as she had Emma's other statements. "A royal?"

Emma nodded and explained, "She isn't a royal in the sense that you are thinking Gina," Emma chuckled, "Amazon's are warriors, a tribe of women who battle and protect one another."

"What did you just call me?"

Emma closed her eyes and twisted her mouth sideways and answered with a shrug, "Gina?"
Regina laughed, "Mother would be appalled, make sure she never hears that!" She broke out into a
fit of giggles that surprised Emma, but she joined the woman in her laugh. "I'll remember that.
Why don't you try to get some rest?"

"I am quite hungry, Emma," the girl prodded. Emma nodded, then spoke out to the guard she knew
was there. "Eponin?" the warrior entered at attention, "Yes Your Highness?" Emma closed her eyes
and dropped her head at Regina's gasp, and Eponin knew right then she made a mistake. Emma
lifted her head and met the apologetic gaze of the warrior. "Would you mind getting Regina some
broth, please?" with a nod Eponin left the room.

Regina now had her eyes lowered in respect as her mother had taught her, but didn't say anything
more. Emma took a deep breath as she searched for a plausible explanation. "I'm not a royal," she
started, "I hold the title of princess in name only. I am your friend Regina. Okay?"

"Yes," Regina's soft voice replied, but no further requests or inquiries were made of Emma for the
rest of the afternoon.

*Sweet fucking hell,* Emma thought to herself. *Could this get any worse?* Her mind suddenly
remembered the girl had been in a coma not just a few hours before. *Yes, Miss Swan, it
could.* Emma smiled sadly as she remembered her Regina.

Eponin had brought two bowls of stew; the meat was sweet as were the potatoes. Emma propped
up Regina in the bed and proceeded to spoon feed the girl, who looked mortified at the prospect of
being waited upon by a princess. "Listen, kiddo, you need to eat up so you can get better. I'm no
better than you or Eponin over there."

Regina looked confused by this, "Isn't she the help? Mother says they are not spoken to unless
given directions or reprimanded on poor service."

Emma slowly shook her head, "Wow, Cora was… is… a piece of work." After regaining her
composure she explained, "No, Regina. That isn't how the Amazons operate. Everyone contributes
to the success of the whole. Everyone has a responsibility and a task they fulfill to make the village
successful. No one is better or worse. There is no caste or class. They are equal."

Regina thought about this, "But they have a queen?" Emma nodded, "Yes, but Gabrielle, she would
lay down her life for any other Amazon life. Even for you, Regina." Emma held the spoon with the
broth up, "Okay? Eat? Please?"

Regina was clearly uncomfortable but still took the nourishment from Emma. she exclaimed her
eyes filled with wonder, "That is, exquisite!" Emma laughed, "Yeah well it's no chimera, but it will
do."

They finished their dinner and Regina settled back down, Emma stroked her temple with the tips of
her fingers and the girl fell asleep. Emma after being sure Regina was indeed asleep stood and
asked Eponin to wait inside the tent. She needed to go see Xena and didn't want Regina to be alone
if she suddenly woke.
"She remembers nothing since she was fifteen fucking years old! What the fuck? Seriously?"

Emma exploded, not in anger, not even directed at anyone in particular but just in general. "She never married the king, she never became the Evil Queen, she never saved my mother! She never cast the curse she never adopted Henry! Holy FUCK!

Holy fucking fuck! Her mother is DEAD. Her father is DEAD. Her beloved Daniel is DEAD! She is in another universe with strangers and FUUUUUUCK she never fucking learned magic! We can't get home! FUCK! Fucking FUCKING Fuck!"

She was pacing during her meltdown as Xena and Gabrielle sat on their bed silently watching her walk back and forth listening to the vulgar rant. "Jesus fucking Christ what the fucking shit am I going to do?"

Xena took a breath to answer as if it were an actual question posed but was cut off by the Sheriff in another mindless rant, "FUCK! I can't open the portal on my own! I have magic, but Regina is the one who knows about it! She just uses it, and I provide the juice she needs to get whatever it is done we need! FUCK!" Emma slowed to a stop when her breathing became more erratic, she started to hyperventilate grasping at her chest when she realized she wasn't getting enough breath. Gabrielle jumped up and guided her to sit, pushing her head down between her legs.

"Deep. Slow. Breaths. Emma, you need to calm down." The blonde head nodded furiously under the bard's hand as she repeatedly tried to suck back wind.

Gabrielle continued. "She is awake. She has some memories. That is a good start. We will get the rest back, and if not, we will find another way to get you two home. For now Emma, we need to take this one day at a time, get her healthy. Did she eat?" The blonde nodded again. "Good. Okay, and she is asleep?"

Another nod.

"Good. Okay, go back to the healer hut and get some rest. Try not to give her too much detail on how much time has passed, the mending of the mind is delicate we mustn't rush it, Emma."

The blonde sniffled but nodded once more.

"We will stop in tomorrow morning and get her out of there and into your living quarters."

The blonde nodded but didn't move. "Her mother… was a monster and that little girl that is in that hut? She is the devoted daughter to the woman who used her for her own ambitions and put her on the path to becoming the Evil Queen." She sat up showing the large tears as they rolled down her face. "I hate Cora. I hate her. She sold Regina into servitude as a teenager. Married her off to the king to be some sort of prize, a trophy wife he could bed. That situation twisted that sweet little girl that is in that hut into a raging hate-filled murderer. Her father stood by and let it happen. How can I set aside my feelings about that, when she looks up at me with those big brown eyes and asks about her parents?"

Xena stood. "You just will Emma. It's what's best for her. Any major shock and we could never recover our Regina." Emma took a deep breath, wide-eyed and nodded. "Right. I can do this. FUCK! Okay, see you guys in the morning." At the door, she turned, "Thank you for saving her." Emma sheepishly looked at the two women who had quickly become her friends, "And thank you
for letting me rant. I'm sorry."

Most of the town volunteered for the search party, and David put his grandson Henry in charge of his own sector, much to Henry's surprise and elation. Finally being trusted with something as big as this, he couldn't be more proud of himself.

The brunette boy carefully organized his team to cover the area he was assigned, printing them each off maps and putting together little backpacks with water, flashlights, and trail mix bars. They had colored rope to mark areas searched and flags to mark any clues the missing women could have left behind. The boy had thought of everything, David took prideful note of how the young man was organizing his team and made suggestions to the other team leaders to follow Henry's lead.

After a couple of weeks of finding nothing, Snow White was starting to lose hope in ever finding the missing women, let alone finding them alive. They searched the woods to the best of their ability, and if the women were out in the elements for this long, they would surely have perished. These hopeless thoughts prevented the Princess from participating in the search that her grandson and husband continued to push forward with.

Henry answered the door and was greeted by Ruby's trademark wide red smile and a box of freshly baked doughnuts. "Are these for me?" He asked with excitement. He loved bear claws as much as his mother did and David and Ruby let him eat as many as he wanted as of late.

Ruby came in passed the boy and set the box down on the counter. "As many as you can stuff into your teenaged mouth kid." She grabbed his cheek and squeezed it playfully then asked, "Where's Grandma?"

"Where do you think?" He gestured his thumb over his shoulder toward the bed his grandmother had barely gotten out of in weeks. The brunette nodded her head towards David who had answered his phone upon her arrival and headed back towards her friend.

"Hey captain depressie, did you get up today?" the wolf asked with a teasing smile. She sat down on the edge of the woman's bed and rubbed her back. Snow grunted in response, and Ruby knew she wasn't getting anywhere with her friend that day. "Okay sweetie well, Henry is going to come down with me to the station, he said he wanted to go over some maps Emma has of the mine shafts, do you need him home at any specific time?"

The brunette shook her head but didn't say anything more to the wolf on the matter.

"Ruby?" David called from the other room, and she bent down and kissed her friend's temple before getting up and going to see what was needed of her.

"What's up Charming?" She asked taking a seat at the counter and helping herself to one of Henry's bear claws.

"So that was Leroy. The dwarves are down at the mine sealing the place off, so no one goes down there. The place is still unstable. Two more shafts collapsed this week alone."

"Yeah?" Ruby asked after swallowing a large bite of deep fried awesomeness.

"He said the ground opened up and ate Emma's bug."

Ruby choked on the next bite she was swallowing, and David circled the island and whacked her back a few times to help her clear it. "What?" she asked once she could.
"That's what he said, I don't know exactly but he said the ground went back to normal after the bug disappeared, it sounds like a portal maybe?"

"What if Emma and Regina got sucked into one of those things and is in the Enchanted Forest?" Ruby exclaimed entirely too loud.

David shushed her, his eyes darting back towards his wife. "We don't know that. I don't want her getting her hopes up only to fall further than she already is!"

"Do you really think she could fall much further, David? Jesus look at her! I put her in those clothes three days ago man!" Ruby quietly barked back.

"Yeah well, she doesn't listen to me." He folded his arms in defense.

"I don't give her a choice, David!" Ruby threw her hands in the air exasperated.

"Yeah well…" He stumbled, not being able to think of a rebuttal quick enough.

"What Charming?" She folded her arms across her chest and gave him a challenging look.

"I hate seeing her like this, but I don't know what else to do," he scowled.

"Your coddling her isn't helping her," she accused.

"You're right," he relented softly.

"And she… I… I'm right?"

"Yes. I love her too much. I'm truly grateful you come around," he held sincerity in his blue eyes.

"I love her too David. I don't want to lose her." She was still pissed, but she knew this was exactly the reason why he couldn't take care of her friend right now and the fact that he knew it too deflated her a bit.

They stood in uncomfortable silence, with nothing more to say on the matter, until Henry came back downstairs ready to go with Ruby. "Got everything you need kid?"

He nodded and smiled, "And then some!

"Alright well," looking in David's direction, "I'll bring him back when Tink comes in to relieve me."

"I'm going to post an announcement for folks to contact the station if they witness," he quickly glanced towards Henry's direction, and the boy was flipping through his phone seemingly not paying attention to either adult. David also knew looks could be deceiving especially when it came to his highly curious grandson, "anything out of the ordinary," he finished. "So expect a higher call volume tonight."

"Great," the wolf said humorlessly. "Alright well let me know if you hear anything more about, you know, whatever. Anything." Ruby shrugged her shoulders and grabbed another doughnut on her way to herding Henry out the door.

"So what were you two not talking about exactly?" Henry asked as they walked down the stairs.

"Come on, I'll explain in the car," she said with a smirk and a shake of her head.
Regina slept through the night, and Emma woke her with breakfast in bed, much to the woman's surprise. "They have such strange foods here Emma, nothing at all like home!" Regina's wide, curious eyes dissected and inspected every mouthful of her breakfast.

"So I was thinking you'd like to get out of the healer's hut today and maybe you'd feel up to taking a bath?"

Regina blushed at the insinuation, and Emma held up her hands in her defense before the woman could speak, "That is not a hint! I just thought you'd feel a bit better if you could clean up some. Gabrielle has permitted us to use her private baths. It's pretty cool."

"You mean for me to take a cold bath?" Regina asked confused by the blonde's vernacular.

"No no, it's heated by an underground something, I don't really understand how it works, Eponin tried to explain it to me but, yeah, no it is definitely hot though."

"Oh." The brunette's features were soft and sweet, and Emma couldn't help thinking this is what Regina would be like if it weren't for her mother.

Regina, on the other hand, was trying not to feel the shame she felt for misunderstanding the royal who sat on the side of her bed. Her mother's voice loudly boomed within her. She tried hard to remember the conversation she and Emma had the previous day about the status of royalty in this strange kingdom, but the uncomfortable shame she felt was ever present.

Emma pulled herself out of her own thoughts and focused back on the brunette. "So, yes?" A timid nod was her reply. "Great!" Emma reached for the girl's hand to help her off of the cot. "I hope you don't mind, but we are sharing a hut. You can have the bed, and I'll ask someone to bring in an extra cot for myself…” She trailed off when she saw the horrified look in her friend's eyes. "What is it?"

Regina took a breath clamping her lips together between her teeth and shook her head. Emma turned to face the brunette and lifted her chin so the woman would have no choice but to look her in the eyes. "Do you not feel comfortable sleeping in the same room as me?"

Regina shook her head, and her eyes glassed up as if she were about to cry.

"Okay sweetheart, it's okay, I'll sleep here if you feel more comfortable."

"Noooo! Em-maaaaaa!" the brunette whined in the cutest way imaginable and made Emma chuckle. "Okay you're going to need to tell me what's wrong sweetheart, I can't read your mind," the blonde said with a warm smile and a worried crinkle in her brow.

Regina looked down breaking eye contact with the mesmerizing green eyes that seem to study every detail of her always. "You're a royal. It is wrong for you to sleep upon a cot."

Emma should have expected that this was the issue, but was nonetheless blindsided by it. "Oh, well you're ill kiddo. You need your rest so you will get better." She put her arm around the smaller brunette and led her out of the hut towards their accommodations.

Once they were in their shared hut, Emma led the girl to the bed and had her sit down. She went around the room and pulled out items Regina would need for her bath and laid them down next to her, including the Amazon outfit they purchased. She brought back two large white fluffy towels and added them to the pile she was making.

"What's this?" Regina asked curiously fingerling the leather skirt.
"Those are your clothes unless you'd like to get back into some pajamas? But... I thought we could go for a walk after you're done with your bath?" Emma asked hopefully. *Fresh air, exercise, good food, she'll remember in no time!*

"But I'll be nude in this!" she exclaimed looking at the cut up pieces of leather. "I would never wear something so revealing Emma, Mother wouldn't allow it."

Emma knelt so she looked up at Regina who had insisted on keeping her eyes lowered in the presence of a royal and gently said, "Oh kiddo, there is a little thing that goes under it, no one can see anything, I promise."

Regina held up the skirt to her hips and then lifted a questioning eyebrow toward Emma and complained, "It barely covers half of my thigh!"

"There are no men here sweetie. You have nothing to be modest about. All the women in this village wear these. It's like traditional or whatever."

"I may be only 15 Emma, but I know things about the world. I know just because they are not men, doesn't mean they won't care to look at a half naked girl!" Regina's features turned beet red, and Emma nodded trying to buy herself time to think of a good response.

"You're pretty smart, huh kid? How do you know about that kind of stuff hmm?" Regina looked away, and a tear slid over her cheek.

"Hey, it's okay. It's just you and me here." Emma got up and sat on the bed next to her friend then put her arm around the trembling girl.

"You obviously don't know my mother, Emma. She knows all. She sees all," the girl whispered as if Cora could hear them.

"She can't hear us. There is no magic in this place."

"No magic?" Regina's face turned from fear to astonishment. "How is that possible."

"I don't know, it just is. I swear." Regina looked skeptical. "Look," Emma swept her hand around in the same way she had seen Regina do a thousand times to summon a fireball and sure enough nothing happened.

"You know magic?"

Emma nodded her lie to the woman. *It's not really a lie, I have magic, there isn't magic here, and her mother can't hear her.*

"So relax kiddo, no one is listening in on our conversation. It is just you and me." Emma patted Regina's knee to accentuate her point, "You don't have to tell me though, it's okay."

Regina sat quietly for a few moments and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "There was a girl in a nearby village I was friends with when I was young. Her father had business with Daddy, and he would bring me along, and I would play with her while he worked."

Emma smiled and felt her heart fill with love as she got an unexpected glimpse into her friend's past.

"She always wanted to play dress up and brush my hair and one day she kissed me, like how a boy would kiss a girl." Regina fidgeted and added for Emma's clarification, "On my lips, that is."
Emma swallowed hard, uncertain of what to say to the unexpected admission. "Did you… kiss her back?"

Regina nodded as shame filled her face with crimson blush and a tear slid over her cheek.

"Hey, it's okay. That's okay you know?" Emma rushed to try and let the woman feel less embarrassed over the admission.

"No it isn't, Daddy caught us, and he told mother." She lifted a shaky hand to her upper lip and slid her finger over the scar that wasn't her only permanent reminder of that day.

"He told her?" Emma exclaimed in shock, "Did she…" shaking her head as if her ears didn't want to know the answer to the question her mouth was asking, "Did she hurt you?"

Regina didn't answer, but instead, her body trembled with fear as the all too recent memories of that afternoon came rushing back to the brunette.

Emma wrapped her arms around the girl and pulled her into the safety of her embrace. "Okay kiddo, okay… shhhh… it's over. You're safe, here with me. You're safe Regina. Okay?" She tucked the dark-haired woman under her chin and rocked and soothed her. Emma held herself together as she felt her heart pound with the rage she felt. She had been privy to some messed up abusive situations in foster care, but they never lasted long. She would get hurt too badly, and someone would notice, and she would get removed from the home.

Cora was Regina's mother. There was no social worker to come to young Regina's rescue. Emma felt sick to her stomach but breathed through it so she could be strong for her queen. She may not be able to change things for Regina in terms of going back in time and ripping that evil bitch's throat out, but she could protect the girl the Queen used to be right now today. She can make that girl feel safe and secure.

"Are you not disgusted by me Emma?" the small voice asked into her collarbone.

"What? No! None of that was your fault! Your mother is a…" She hummed the string of derogatory curse words she had loaded and ready for the likes of Cora Mills. "And your father!" Emma bit her tongue, clenched her jaw and shook her head trying not to say what she honestly thought of the cowardly man who was supposed to protect his daughter from the witch who happened to give birth to the girl.

"No, are you not disgusted by what I told you?"

"About Cora? Of course! But I'm not disgusted by you sweetheart! She's the one who…"

"No, about kissing the girl, like she were a boy."

Emma pulled back and looked at the woman with confusion stitched across her face. "God no. Why would you think…" Emma closed her eyes and realized that Cora was the one who educated her daughter on the rules of royals and to this girl, Emma was a royal.

"Listen to me, okay? Whatever Mommy dearest told you about practices and beliefs of royals is simply untrue. Some women kiss women like men kiss women. A lot of them. All over the place. There are even men who kiss men."

Regina scrunched up her nose at the prospect and Emma chuckled lightly. "It is perfectly natural, and the people who do that are born with the desire to do that, just like people who like kissing the opposite sex. Those people have a desire to do that, they didn't choose to one day, it is apart of who
they are, and they can't change that about themselves."

"They can change that," Regina argued softly.

"No kiddo, they can't."

"I am with Daniel now. He loves me. He is going to take me away from Mother and her rules and her punishments."

Emma couldn't help the look of heartbreak on her face as she read between the lines of what young Regina was telling her. She swallowed thickly and nodded in agreement to what Regina was trying to tell her. "Okay, some people like to kiss both boys and girls too."

Regina's head snapped up, and dark brown eyes fixated on Emma's face, looking for signs of deception. A soft voice asked tentatively, "There are?"

Emma nodded. Regina seemed lost in her own thoughts taking in this information handed to her by, for all intents and purposes, was a virtual stranger to her.

"I know you have no reason to believe what I am saying to you over your mother, you don't even remember that we are friends, but I wouldn't lie to you."

*About this.*

"And I promise, what we talk about, stays between us. Okay?" The brunette nodded her head and wiped a stray tear away. She had quite a bit to think about.

"You don't have to wear your amazon outfit if it makes you feel uncomfortable. I'm sure I can get you a dress like Maggie, the healer woman, had on if you want."

Regina shook her head and turned to pick up the leather outfit that was apparently hers. "I don't want to cause trouble. I'll wear this, thank you, Emma."

*You're nothing but trouble Emma Swan!*

"Regina! You are *not* trouble, do you hear me?" Emma realized by the look in the brunette's eyes she had said the words meant to comfort the girl, far too harshly and immediately apologized. "I'm sorry, I just mean, anything you want Regina, it is not a bother. I want you to feel comfortable."

Regina looked as though the harsh words had been a scolding. She nodded her head silently, and Emma closed her eyes and internally chastised herself for letting her past get in the way of progress with Regina.
Once Regina finished her bath, she accompanied Emma out to the training yard to watch the Amazons do drill work. They sat in the shade of a tree and Emma basked in the fact that Regina was awake. She wasn't better by any stretch of the imagination, but she was up and around, and as far as Emma was concerned, this was the best day of her life.

Regina sat like a lady, straight-backed with her legs folded under her to the side and was seemingly fascinated by the warrior women and their stunt work.

"They are pretty amazing huh?"

"They certainly are Emma! I've never seen women do this kind of fighting before! They fight like men!"

"I'm pretty sure these ladies would give most men a serious run for their money." Regina tilted her head as if she had a question regarding what the blonde said but didn't speak it aloud. "I mean they could beat men one on one most of the time. They are highly trained and very skilled," Emma explained, reading her friend with ease.

"Indeed. It is quite elegant to watch," Regina took a quick glance up and met the eyes of the blonde to her side. "Thank you for bringing me here.

Emma smiled honestly, and the brunette broke eye contact once more.

"I asked Gabrielle if there was anything I could do to help out around here and she suggested that perhaps I take on a scouting mission around the perimeter of the village. Would you care to join me?" Regina silently nodded. "The royals you know, they don't do anything menial like that would they?" Regina silently shook her head no, but still kept her eyes lowered in respect as she was taught.

Emma sighed as she realized she wasn't getting anywhere with the young girl regarding her perception of royalty. More specifically how the girl treated Emma. "Alright well let's go back to the hut so I can grab some weapons."

Regina gasped, "Is this dangerous Emma?"

"Nah, Gabrielle said it was just a walk in the woods. I thought you'd like to see the colors of the leaves here. It is quite spectacular."

"I would like that very much actually," Regina replied shyly.

Once outfitted with her looted sword and Regina's bow and arrows they headed off to find Ephiny for assignment.

The no-nonsense curly blonde barked out orders to her warriors as they came filing into her command tent. Emma strode up to the table the woman was leaning over and asked for the perimeter trek. Dark brown eyes narrowed studying the pair for a moment, and Regina instinctively cowered into Emma. Emma grasped her queen's hand gently and spoke with authority, "Gabrielle said we could help out."

"Where is it we can scout?"

Ephiny stood tall and pointed towards an area on the map. Emma looked it over studying the details. Gabrielle said it would be a worn path they used for recruits. She said to stay on the trail,
and they won't get lost.

"Got it. Anything we need to know before going out there?" The surly Amazon's silence was rubbing Emma the wrong way. She was intimidating her queen and trying to be the alpha-blond and top dog in the room. "Scouts have picked up word bandits are in the eastern quadrant," Ephiny pointed to the other side of the map. "So stay in your sector, and you two should be fine," the Amazon said coolly. Ephiny wasn't partial to outsiders. Outsiders meant anyone who was not an Amazon warrior. Emma flashed a disarmingly warm smile and thanked the woman, she held tight to Regina's hand and led the girl from the tent.

"I don't like that one. She's mean," Regina mumbled as they made their way across camp.

"Yeah her bark is worse than her bite. With people like that, you just gotta remember you've got nothing to prove to them."

"You're very brave Emma," Regina said and squeezed tight the hand she still held. The blonde flashed a smile towards the young version of her friend and said, "Naw, I just know how to read people, and that girl, she's an open book."

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Xena made her way back to the Queen's quarters after a day of studying the new basic forms Eponin was teaching the Amazon recruits. She wanted to integrate some of their moves in with her morning routine. Eponin was muscular, but incredibly flexible, something that Xena has always admired about the Amazon. The way the woman performed drills was like watching a dance. It was precise and breathtaking, and although Xena knew she could beat the woman in hand to hand combat, but of all the Amazons, Poni would give her the greatest challenge.

She entered the hut to find her Queen laying on the bed in nothing but a towel. Xena instantly smelled the lavender from the baths as she opened the door. Gabrielle's eyes were closed, but Xena knew by how the blonde's chest moved that the woman was not asleep. The brunette boldly walked up to her bard and dragged a single finger up the inside of the blonde's knee.

Green eyes slowly opened to tiny slits. "Hello, my sweaty brat."

"My Queen," Xena drawled with a mischievous smile.

Gabrielle bent one of her knees up on the bed, opening herself to the cool air of the room, and smirked as she heard her warrior's breath catch. "It has been so long since you've paid tribute to your Queen," Gabrielle said in a husky voice.

"Far too long..." Xena replied breathlessly.

"Remove your armor and leathers and put on the shift I have set out for you on the table."

Xena quickly obeyed knowing the next few hours of her life were going to be basking in the love of her Queen. She pulled her long dark hair out of the back of the cotton nightgown and looked over to the blonde who hadn't moved a muscle.

"Come," Gabrielle commanded, and Xena took several large strides to stand next to the bed and waited patiently for the bard's next command. The blonde opened her towel, letting the edges fall to the wayside and her sun-kissed skin to be exposed to the warrior who was looking down at her with hungry eyes. She let her fingers slide down her own body and then arched her back and stretched, releasing a high pitched squeal for dramatic effect. Her hands slid back up and covered her pert pink tips, rubbing the palms of her hands over her nipples she moaned.
Her warrior began to fidget as she took in the teasing sight before her, and Gabrielle smirked at her Princess' impatience. The Queen crooked her finger and beckoned Xena to come to her, and the brunette did not hesitate, she climbed up on the bed and hovered over the smaller woman and waited for permission she was sure was coming.

"Pleasure me with your mouth, Princess. I want to feel how much you desire me." Xena instantly covered Gabrielle's nipple with her mouth and groaned in pleasure for doing so. Xena's skillful tongue bounced from one breast to the other then back once again making the blonde beneath her pant and arch her back. She plucked the hard nipples with her teeth and lips, teasing and pushing the bard toward her release.

Gabrielle bent both of her legs and opened herself wide, she ran two of her fingers through her wetness and circled her pulsing clit. The warrior was too busy with what she was doing to notice her queen's actions until the blonde coated her own nipple with her abundant juices. When Xena wrapped her tongue around the desire coated breast her eyes flew open in surprise and then growled out from deep within her chest.

Xena slid down and settled between the woman's open legs and licked her tongue up the length of Gabrielle's wet folds, cleaning her thoroughly.

"Yes, baby. Worship your queen," Gabrielle moaned and ran her fingers through the brunette's hair.

Xena pushed her tongue into Gabrielle who arched her back at the teasing muscle penetrating her. Xena nipped and licked her way back up and covered her lips around Gabrielle's nub. The bard cried out and bucked her hips against Xena as the warrior brought her to orgasm.

She panted and ran her fingers through her warrior's raven locks, "I love you, Xena."

Xena looked up and breathlessly said, "You are my everything, Gabrielle."

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After their trek through the woods, Emma and Regina got back to their hut and Emma noticed there was a book with a piece of parchment attached sitting on the table.

Ρεγγίνα, written on the parchment.

"I'm going to go ahead and say this is for you," Emma said and handed her the book. "What strange writing!" Regina exclaimed. "How do you know it is for me?"

"Well there's too many letters for Emma, and Gabrielle said something about getting you a diary. Said it could help you get better."

Regina ran her fingers over the leather-bound book with reverence. "I will treasure it," she said with awe. "May I write in it now?" She looked up at Emma seeking permission. "You can do whatever you want kiddo. Do you mind if I go get washed up? I won't be long."

Regina grabbed the quill and ink that was left with the book and rushed over to the desk and set down her supplies. "I'm going to write all about the Amazon warriors and how elegant they are in battle!"

Emma chuckled at the queen's childlike exuberance and gathered up her things. She kissed her friend on the crown of her head and then silently slipped out of the room.

Eponin was standing on the stoop and Emma informed her she where she would be and asked her to stay and watch over Regina. "As you wish Highness." The Amazon knew full well Emma had
been trying to shake the recovering brunette of thinking of her as a royal and was poking fun at the blonde.

The curl of Eponin's lips made Emma smirk. "Oh, you've got jokes now huh? Funny!" Emma exaggerated a fake belly laugh halfway to the bath cave. Looking back occasionally to see the warrior smiling brightly.

Several days went by, and there was no change in Regina whatsoever, Gabrielle came to Emma's hut to discuss the administration of more antidote.

"But I feel fine, Emma, tell her I am getting better!" Regina whined, not at all happy with needles and made her displeasure known.

"Kiddo, remember when we talked about your memories, they aren't coming back, not even a little bit. We just need to give you more medicine to help you remember more stuff, okay?"

"Isn't there another way?"

The brunette looked frightened, and it broke Emma's heart. "I know it is scary looking but I'll be right here with you, and if it hurts too much you can squeeze my hand as hard as you need to okay? Please, Regina, will you do this? For me?"

A tear slid down the Queen's face as she reluctantly nodded, her features crumpled and she started to cry. Surprised, Emma pulled the girl into her and soothed her, "Okay sweetheart." She rubbed the Queen's back and whispered encouraging things to her, "It's okay I'm right here. Emma's right here kiddo."

Regina dramatically winced in pain as Gabrielle prepared her arm for the IV bag of medicine. She buried her head into Emma's chest and quietly sobbed, but allowed the women to do what they needed to do. Emma brushed away her own tears, as the woman's childlike sobs ripped at her. It felt like her heart was being ripped from her chest, because she knew what that felt like, and she rolled her eyes at herself knowing that the prick of the thin reed was nothing excruciatingly painful, but the fact that it upset the woman so thoroughly tore at the savior. After several moments the girl quieted down and her body slowly relaxed within the Savior's arms.

"Regina!?" Emma started to panic a little, and her wild eyes looked up to Gabrielle, "What happened? Is she okay?"

"Most strong medicines put the patient into a restorative sleep Emma, she was already asleep the first time, this is most likely natural."

"It is the most likely part that scares me Gab!"

"We'll keep a close eye on her sweetie. She is in good hands."

Emma looked embarrassed and mumbled, "I know."

"And I know you're just worried about her."
Chapter 16

Emma sat at the table in her shared hut with Regina, sharpening her sword and doing maintenance on Regina's bow while the brunette slept. With Regina unconscious, Emma had no hope of sleeping herself, so she kept busy through the night and kept a watchful eye on the brunette. It was the wee hours of the morning when the queen finally stirred. With the first sleepy groan, Emma rushed over to the Queen's side.

"Take it easy Regina."

The Queen slowly opened her eyes and focused on the worried looking blonde next to her. "Where am I?"

"You're in our room. It's okay."

Regina looked around the hut with concern. "Wh-what? This isn't my quarters."

"Regina, do you know who I am?" Emma asked cautiously and couldn't help her features fall in disappointment when the woman shook her head no.

The brunette sat up slowly. "Where am I?" she asked once more, a look of panic crossed her face as nothing in the room resembled anything remotely familiar.

"Okay, listen. I'm Emma. I'm your friend. You had an accident and are here to recover. How are you feeling otherwise? Do you feel pain anywhere?" Emma tried to appear calmer than she was feeling. She hadn't been expecting to have the girl lose the new memories she gained over the last few days. She worries what would happen if she wakes up every day and never knows who Emma is? For the rest of her life? That caused the blonde to panic that she quickly stuffed away.

Regina pulled in her features to a worried scowl and shook her head no. She pulled up her knees and wrapped her arms around herself. Emma noticed immediately the meek, timid nature of the woman, so much different than the wild curiosity that she was the previous day.

"Where is the King?" the brunette asked without making eye contact.

Emma looked confused for a moment, unsure of how to answer that particular question. She didn't want to frighten Regina, but she hated lying to her. The fact that she was asking about the king meant she had perhaps progressed with the last dose and by the shy demeanor of the woman, this was not the evil queen, but the girl who married the king. "You are safe here with me. The King is… away."

"No." The softness of the girl's brown eyes filled with fright as they flicked up to meet Emma's gaze. "I can not be away from the castle without him." Her wide eyes looked panicked, and she tried to get up from the bed.

"It's okay, Regina," Emma tried to hold the woman still with minimal success.

With watery eyes, she pulled out of Emma's grasp and moved away from her toward the center of the bed and said quietly but with an unexpected edge to her voice, "No! You don't understand! He doesn't let me and Mother made sure that I'll never be without him!"

Emma put a calming hand on the queen's knee and tried to soothe her, "You are in my care now Regina, I won't let anything happen. You're ill and need rest, and we are here to get you better
okay?"

"Is he angry with me?" her eyes held the perplexity she felt, and her deep voice was timid.

"What? No, you had an accident, Regina! I promise no one could be angry at that."

The sincerity in the green eyes of the strange woman calmed Regina down a little bit, but she was still visibly nervous. "Are you my royal guard?" she asked looking at the weapons around the room.

"I am your friend, but I am responsible for your safety as well," she said with a soft smile.

"I don't know you. I don't have friends. I am Queen!"

Emma's brow wrinkled up with concern and then she shook her head slightly. "The accident you had is affecting your memory, Regina. It's okay though. You are getting better."

"And then the King will come for me?"

Emma smiled, "Sure thing." Trying to reassure the woman who was clearly distressed to be seemingly alone without her husband. "Can I get you anything? Would you like some water?"

Regina nodded her head, but her eyes were unfocused and distant. Emma got up and got the woman a cup of water from the basin in the other room. When she got back to the bedroom, she saw Regina had rolled over with her back facing Emma and was curled up around her pillow in a tight little ball.

Emma sat at the edge of the bed and gently touched Regina on the shoulder, "Here you are." She felt the slightest twitch from the Queen as the woman instinctively cowered back from her touch. Confused she softly said, "Alright. I'll just put it here next to your book for when you want it okay?" Emma's mind was reeling, "Just get some rest, I'll be right here if you need me." She turned and picked up her sword and sharpening supplies to continue her busy work in the other room as not to disturb the Queen.

Emma's heart pounded hard in her chest as she tried to wrap her head around this new Regina. The Queen Regina. Before the madness, before her revenge, before she was a murderer. Emma was uncertain as to how to approach this new version of her friend. Young Regina she treated like the child she was, not so much as a mother, but more like a big sister. The young girl was so open and honest with Emma, so unlike the guarded nervous woman the brunette was now.

She remembered stories her mother told of Regina before she married the King, how bright and loving and kind she was, and all of those things were true. The only other stories Emma could recall her mother talking about after the woman's marriage to Emma's grandfather were that of the Evil Queen. Nothing of this frightened girl that now lay in the other room.

"...He doesn't let me and Mother made sure I'll never be without him..." Emma looked back towards the room her friend was in and wondered to herself if Cora had done something magical so Regina couldn't leave the King.

Was she trapped there? Emma scowled at that thought. She certainly wouldn't put it passed Cora to imprison her daughter at the castle. Snow never said Regina was a prisoner... She shook her head and started to worry. Maybe her mother didn't know... Emma's stomach flipped, and she was suddenly concerned that telling Regina that the King would be back for her was the wrong thing to say to her.
A couple of hours after sunrise a knock at the door pulled Emma away from her silent worrisome thoughts. Xena stood behind Gabrielle and dropped her bright smile when she saw the look of the blonde who answered the door. "What happened now?"

"Nothing I guess... She's no longer 15," Emma shrugged her shoulders and opened the door wider for her friends to enter.

Gabrielle moved passed the taller blonde, entering the woman's hut and questioned, "That's good right?"

"Yeah," Emma said with a scowl.

The bard looked up at Xena questioningly, then back to Emma. "May I see her?" Emma nodded and led the women back to the bedroom where the queen was still curled up in her bed.

"Regina?" Emma called tentatively, the woman didn't stir, but Emma could tell by her breathing that she was not asleep either. "This is Xena and Gabrielle, our friends." The Queen was unresponsive, and Emma looked worryedly back towards Gabrielle.

"Hey sweetie, how are you feeling?" The bard tried to get the Queen's attention and then circled around the other side of the bed and sat down next to Regina within her line of sight. Xena tapped Emma on her shoulder and nodded for her to follow her into the other room which Emma did promptly.

"Has she said anything to you since she woke up?" Xena asked in a low tone as soon as they made it into the adjacent room.

"Yeah. She doesn't remember being the young Regina we've known the last few days. She is older though. She is married to the King because she questioned his whereabouts. I don't know what is wrong with her though. She is so... different than the Regina I know. Even from the Regina from yesterday..." Emma filled the brunette in, mimicking her low, quiet tone.

"How so?"

"You saw her!" Emma whispered. "She's... like... I don't know... nervous and fearful and I don't know enough about this time of her life to help her!"

"We need to wait a couple of days before we give her more of the antidote, so what is important is making her feel safe okay?"

"I think... I think the King hurt her... and I think her mother may have made it so she couldn't escape him." Emma's eyes started to tear up, and she bit back the emotion and held firm before the warrior princess.

Xena took in a breath and nodded her head in understanding. She put up a good fight, but soon sorrow enveloped Emma as she realized this was Regina's life and she was getting a front-row seat to the horrors of what the woman had gone through. "I... I don't think I can... I don't think I'm strong enough to..." she stalled her thought and breathed deeply to contain herself.

Xena put her hand on her friend's shoulder, "You are."

Emma shook her head in disagreement, "I really don't think I am.. The more I find out about her life, the harder it gets... the angrier I get..." Emma took a deep breath and raked her fingers through her hair. "I'm not even sure if what I think happened actually happened! I just suspect... I mean..." Emma shook her head at herself.
"Emma, no matter what happened, she may be reliving it now, but this is her past. She's already done the hard part and survived. You can live with this knowledge. You can live with knowing she was strong enough to survive this and you can admire her for doing so. You can also be grateful because every little piece makes her the woman you are in love with."

Emma pushed the tear that fell defiantly from her lash when a realization hit her, "Oh god we are going to come face to face with the Evil Queen aren't we?"

"I'd say the evidence points to yes. Is there anything we can do to keep Regina safe from herself when we do?"

"She doesn't have magic here, so that is a huge plus in our favor," Emma thought to herself aloud, feeling a little more in control of herself being pointed towards something she could control. "Before the next dose, I'll clear the hut of anything that can be used as a weapon. She is resourceful though. Especially when she feels threatened or cornered."

"Okay, we have the brig if need be."

Emma's eyes watered up, and her lip trembled, "I don't want to put her in there."

"I know Emma, but what is important is keeping Regina safe until she gets better."

Emma sighed and shook her head at herself. "I know. I'll keep her safe. We'll keep it as an option only if we have to, okay?"

Xena nodded in agreement.

"Do you... is there a way we can get her something she will wear without a fight? I'm worried that this Regina won't put on the Amazon outfit. I had a hard time convincing young Regina to wear it, and she was less guarded than she is right now." Xena nodded and promised she would have someone send something over that would cover the Queen.

Gabrielle came out to the main room and joined Emma and Xena with a worried scowl. Emma pursed her lips together and fought back her emotions. "How is she, physically?" Xena asked the bard.

"She seems to be okay," the little blonde answered in a hushed tone. "She has a headache and is overall alright. She has no memories of the last few days, or as Emma said, anything recent, however, I didn't get much out of her. Mostly yes and no answers." She turned to Emma, "I'm not sure how to help her, she seems so..."

"I know," Emma replied. The pain she felt over her helplessness was evident as the Sheriff's green eyes met blue, "At least she's progressed, right? How long before we can give her more antidote?"

"A couple days, as I said, her body is recovering. Slow is better," Xena smiled a compassionate pirate smile towards the Sheriff.

"Until then, I'll try and just keep her safe," Emma sighed.

Gabrielle put her hand on the shoulder of her friend, "Let us know if you need anything." The two warriors turned and left the blonde alone.

Emma returned to the bedroom and looked down at the brunette who was facing away from her,
still curled up in the center of the bed. Emma walked around the edge of the bed as Gabrielle had
done and squatted down, so she was eye level with the Queen. "Are you hungry?"

The woman shook her head no.

"Will you eat something if I bring it?"

Regina's watery eyes flicked up to meet Emma's, and she shook her head no once more.

"Okay sweetie, I won't make you, but will you drink the water I brought? Please?"

Regina didn't respond and just pulled the sheet she was clutching closer to herself. Emma sighed
and stood. She lifted the blanket that had been pushed down the bed and covered the lithe woman
and left the room. She didn't stray far, in case her friend needed her, but she was at a total loss as to
how to help her. She resigned to the fact that rest would be best and forcing her to do anything she
was opposed to doing would do more harm than good.

Emma kept her vigil over her friend over the next 36 hours. She sat helplessly as the woman wept,
refusing to talk to the savior about what was wrong. She barely took in fluids and only at extreme
begging from the blonde did she consume any food whatsoever. Emma recognized all of the signs
of severe depression the queen was exuding and her heart broke as to the reasons why the woman
behaved in such a way. Emma silently brooded over the injustice her friend suffered and vowed to
have a discussion with her mother once all of this was over about her grandfather's motives. If she
knew and still called the woman Evil.
Several villages along the Amazon territory had been taken out over the last few weeks. It wasn't in the province, but it was people the Amazons relied upon for supplies, barter, and trade. The towns hadn't just been ransacked, but the people slaughtered in very particular ways. The rumor mill outside the Amazonian villages had it that the Centar Nation was making their move onto Amazon territory. Gabrielle knew better of course and obviously wanted to know who dared slight them in such a way, she was about facts. 

"Knowledge is power."

"I need to get to the bottom of this," An agitated warrior paced.

"We will. The scout will be back in the morning."

"I'd prefer to go to the source."

"I know you would, my love, but you know we need the appearance of minimal involvement. I have to answer to the council. This isn't a warlordship."

"I know," the warrior princess pouted.

"I know you know," the bard smiled and stepped closer to the taller woman. "You're just restless. Perhaps we need to expel that excess energy you are keeping." Petite hands grabbed muscular shoulders, and the bard felt her warrior relax at the touch. "I've been preoccupied haven't I?"

"A little."

"I know that's why you love coming here." Xena shrugged her shoulders noncommittally. Fingers slipped down the strong arms of the warrior, and her hand was taken to be led into the back of the queen's quarters. Piece by piece the armor and weapons were stripped from the taller woman. Xena helped the blonde until she was down to her skivvies then she was left standing, expected to wait.

The bard made her way to under their bed and pulled a large wooden chest from beneath and from it grabbed several bundles of silky fibrous rope. Xena's heart started to pound when she saw the tan colored bindings and a warm feeling in her stomach twisted with anticipation. The shorter woman stood behind the warrior princess and used her touch to soothe and caress. She wrapped her hands firmly around the wrists of the princess and shook out the tension she felt in her extremities. Skillfully she twisted and positioned Xena's wrists up under her shoulder blades and fixed them into place with a length of rope. She guided the tails around the woman's body, checking and rechecking the fit and position of each length as it wound over the warrior's chest. The beautiful thick knots she tied with care, securing the woman's upper body and soon the warrior was unable to move her arms. The bard made quick silent work of securing the woman, paying more attention to how she was tying the rope and less how roughly she was moving and manipulating the warrior princess.

With the first part complete, she dug her blunt nails over the taller woman and took in the physical representation of her excitement. Her labored breaths made only more shallow by the tight grip the bindings had upon her. Her nipples were standing at attention between tracks of soft rope. Blue eyes turned black in pleasure, and Gabrielle knew her princess was ready for more.

She worked a second rope in and around the first, securing it, tightening and weaving a harness up and around the warrior's thick shoulders. She wrapped the rope over the taller woman's neck then
used it to pull her down into a possessive kiss. A kiss that was greedily accepted and hungrily taken. "Hmm, you like it when your Queen dotes upon you don't you?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

With a smirk, Gabrielle finished tying the second rope around the woman and then made final checks to her contact points and anchors. She slapped Xena's ass to bring the woman back around out of her relaxed state, "Don't fall away just yet Xena."

"I'm sorry Mistress."

"I know it feels good, doesn't it?"

A raven head bobbed her agreement and sniffled back the tears her bondage brought on.

"We're almost done, baby. I've got you," Gabrielle whispered and kissed her warrior's face with purpose. When she noted the woman had regained her control, she continued her work and tossed the tails of the suspension ropes over the hut's load-bearing beam and latched it through the carefully structured anchors on Xena's harness. With effort, she lifted the princess onto her tippy toes and secured her. She pushed the princess off balance, and Xena's head bowed forward, and Gabrielle knew the warrior was slipping into a state of euphoria.

She made quick work of carefully tying up the woman's long legs allowing for her weight to be suspended upon the natural load points of the woman's body. Once she was finished, she caressed Xena's cheek and whispered encouragement to her. There was something about this peaceful state her love went into that satisfied the Queen, perhaps it was the control the warrior allowed over her, but it was powerful, and Gabrielle relished in it for as long as she could.

In the early afternoon, Xena stopped by and informed Emma that they could give the queen another dose that evening, much to Emma's relief. Her heart was breaking every moment she watched her friend recede deeper and deeper into herself. Just as the other times, she would need an empty stomach before she could be administered the dose, and as it was lunch time, Emma figured getting a proper meal in now would be best for her Queen.

Emma brought in the outfit Xena had procured for the brunette. It was a long hemmed sundress, cream colored and had yellow embroidered dandelions all over it. Emma brought it back into the bedroom and presented it to her friend.

She approached the woman slowly and quietly. "Regina, how about you get dressed and we will go get some lunch hmm?" As she did before, the brunette refused with a silent shake of her head. Emma wasn't taking no for an answer this day and sat down next to her. "You are ill your majesty. You need sustenance for your strength so you can get better."

For the first time that day, she heard Regina speak, "If I get better, you will bring me back to the castle."

"You don't want to go back, do you?" Emma asked quietly knowing the answer. Frightened, untrusting, dark eyes flicked up to meet Emma's kind green, but she didn't answer.

Emma broke their gaze and looked down with a sigh. "I am your friend. I am loyal to you, my Queen," Emma spoke trying to hold back how she honestly felt about Regina's current mindset. "You need to eat a proper meal because I refuse to lose you. You are too important to me," Emma said without making eye contact. She knew if she looked down into those dark pools at that
moment, the stresses of the last couple of days would break her down. She needed to be Regina's strength right now.

"Please your Majesty?" Emma laid the dress down next to her friend and stood, leaving the ultimate decision up to her friend.

Regina considered the words from this stranger who seemed to care for her. She decided to comply and took the dress from the tall blonde and sat up straight and steeled her features. Emma turned away pleased with the progress and started to leave the room when the brunette spoke up. "Will there be someone to attend to me?"

Emma stopped mid-step and cringed before turning around. "Do you need help?" she asked worrying her brow.

"I am still Queen am I not?" the brunette's voice seemed all too small and Emma's heart panged knowing that something significant must have happened to turn the bright, wondrous child the woman had been just days before into this meek apologetic woman before her.

"Yes of course!" Emma gushed and approached the brunette cautiously.

With a timid smile, Emma offered to take the sundress from the Queen. "Here, I'll help you."

"You are my guard, not a hand servant," The brunette countered with a skeptical look.

"I.. uh...Yeah... But... um..." Emma stammered trying to think quickly on her feet but failing miserably.

"Is there no chaperone left behind? A contingency of servants?" The Queen studied the guilty look in the blonde woman's green eyes and started to worry her lip. "Am I not Queen?"

"Of course you are!" Emma softened her features and knelt next to the brunette.

"Has he rid of me because I can not produce an heir? Mother will..." Regina lost the color from her cheeks and swallowed audibly and began to panic. "I can try harder! I can cry less! I..."

"No no, Regina, no nothing like that! Jesus okay look," Emma closed her eyes and took her friend's hand. She decided to be honest with her. She wouldn't get into details of her life, just to put the woman's mind at ease. "Listen. I don't want you to freak out or anything okay? But a lot of time has passed from what you can remember to where you actually are in your life."

"I don't understand," the brunette shook her head and knitted her eyebrows together in confusion.

"Look, you are still Queen, but the King is gone. He isn't coming back."

"But Mother..."

"She's gone too," Emma said gently. "You were poisoned, and you seem to only remember up to a certain point of your life. I'm sorry I lied to you earlier, I didn't want to freak you out. I thought you missed the King that's why I told you he was coming back," she defended herself.

"Miss him?" Regina spat with disdain and then cooled her features and looked around nervously.

Emma stroked her friend's hand under her own trying to soothe the woman. "I'm sorry. Listen, I really am your friend, okay? You are safe here with me. I promise I won't lie to you again."

Regina ripped her hand away from her, clearly irritated with the admission of deception. "Why
should I trust you, Emma?"

"Well honestly if I were in your position, I wouldn't." Emma's dark green eyes flicked up to meet her friend's. She reached over and grabbed the diary young Regina happily wrote in. "Here. It's yours. You thought you were 15 just a few days ago. I don't know what you wrote in there, but I'm hoping whatever it is helps you trust me a little."

Regina took the book offered to her and Emma stood up and crossed the room. She gathered some of her belongings and said she was going to change and she'd be right back if Regina needed help with her dress.

When Emma came back into the bedroom, Regina was dressed and regally poised, sitting at the table reading her own diary.

"That looks nice on you," Emma said with a shy smile.

"Thank you, Emma," the brunette said timidly. She closed the book and laid her hands flat over the cover. "The King is gone?"

"Yes," Emma simply replied.

"I am ill because someone poisoned me?"

"You are getting better."

"So I'm not going to die?"

"Not today," Emma said with a half smile. "Would you like to get some lunch down at the mess hall?"

Regina nervously looked around and then shook her head no.

"Come on." Emma begged and held out her hand to help the queen stand when Regina visibly flinched at the movement. Dark eyes looked up and saw the concerned look Emma had on her face, and she instantly apologized to the blonde. "I-I'm sorry, Emma. I-I…"

"No, Regina please don't apologize." Emma silently scolded herself for being so careless. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." she shook her head at herself. "Would you prefer I go get you something? You must be hungry, I'd like you to eat, even if you aren't." Dark eyes knit with worry and she shook her head no once more.

"No you're not hungry, or no you don't want me to go get you something?" Emma asked smartly, reading the woman's body language loud and clear.

"I don't wish for you to leave me on my own, but I… I don't…"

"Are you feeling apprehensive about leaving our room?" Emma finished for her, and the Queen nodded her head with a blush that burned her cheeks. "Okay." Emma smiled warmly. A weight lifted off of her shoulders.

*This was progress.*

Emma opened the door to their hut and quietly asked the guard that was on duty if she could bring lunch to the cabin for herself and Regina. With a tight nod and the warrior was off, and Emma returned to her Queen.
After they ate, Regina asked about her diary. The woman believed it was hers, the writing was certainly her own script, but the words and the things described were only vaguely familiar.

"You were keen on writing in it before, would you like to once again? We have some time before Xena comes with more medicine," Emma casually broke the news to the Queen about their plan for another dose and Regina flinched with surprise.

"I feel much better. I don't believe I need more medicine."

Emma cleared away their dishes and set the quill and inkwell on the table for her friend. "I know you feel better, but you're not. I know you don't like needles, but…” The woman grew rigid, and her eyes open wide at the news of how this supposed medicine would be administered. "But…” Emma knelt next to the brunette and put her hand on her forearm to reassure her. "I'll be right here, okay?" Regina didn't reply, and she was clearly still nervous about what was to come.

After a few moments she questioned the blonde, "Those women, and yourself," her eyes flicked over the abundant amount of skin the blonde showed through her Amazon outfit. "You wear strange clothing." She cleared her throat and adjusted herself in her seat before adding, "Very revealing garments. Why is that?"

Emma tried to hide her smirk as she noticed her friend notice her attributes, albeit subtly. "The village we are in, the people here are Amazons, this is just their traditional style of dress."

"You are not one of these Amazons?" She asked curiously.

Emma shook her head, "No, I was born in the Enchanted Forest."

"We are friends?"

Emma nodded her head.

"And you care for me."

"A great deal. You are my best friend, Regina," she smiled honestly. "I promise I won't let anything happen to you."

They spent the afternoon in quiet company, Emma keeping busy with a small piece of wood and a small bone-handled carving knife and Regina wrote her thoughts down in her diary.

This was better than her refusing to get up out of bed. She is still quiet, but I can handle quiet. Anything is better than crying.

Emma stood from the table to answer the powerful knock at the door. Gabrielle was alone and had a bag in her hand. She looked expectantly up at the blonde and Emma ushered her in. "Where's Xena?" Emma asked.

"We've been having some issues at the eastern border, she is on patrol," Gabrielle said with a warm smile.

"Anything to be worried about?"

"Not yet," came the diplomatic reply.

Emma nodded her acceptance with Gabrielle's closed lipped reply figuring if Xena was taking an interest then it must be serious. However, she kept her thoughts to herself and led the blonde into
the bedroom to Regina.

"Majesty? You remember Gabrielle right?"

Regina turned then stood to greet the shorter blonde. She smoothed out the folds of her dress nervously and gave a tight, slight smile and an elegant curtsy, "Of course." She sat back down in her seat after the short semi-formal greeting.

Emma knelt next to the brunette, finding herself better able to meet the woman's gaze that way. "I'm going to have you get into your sleep shirt because the medicine makes you sleepy. Will you do that for me?" Emma watched as brown eyes studied the Amazon Queen as she set up the strange equipment.

Emma saw fear grip her friend once again, and the all too recent memories of young Regina's meltdown panged her heart. She patted the woman on the knee, "I'm right here. I know you are afraid, but it will be over before you know it, okay?" Emma tried her best to comfort the woman who clearly had an irrational fear of needles and Emma really, honestly, did not want to know the reasons for the phobia. She was sure it would be awful, and she was positive Cora would be involved in some way or another.

*If there is a deity out there please please give me back my Regina!*

"Do you need help, my Queen?" Emma asked as she handed the cotton shift to Regina. The brunette shook her head no but didn't rise to begin to change; she simply watched Gabrielle.

The Amazon Queen felt the eyes on her, and once she was finished setting up the supplies, she excused herself from the bedroom so the Queen could have some privacy. Emma started to follow Gabrielle out of the room but paused when a small sweet voice spoke her name, "Emma?"

"Yes, my Queen?" Emma kept her head bowed and waited for instruction. Reassuring the woman she hadn't been removed as sovereign wasn't easy. In her mind, actions always spoke louder than words ever did so she made a point to treat her friend with the respect she thought a queen would get, in hopes the woman would believe she remained on her throne.

"Would you mind staying? I-I don't require your assistance, I just, am comforted by your presence."

Emma nodded and took a seat at the table facing away from Regina to give her privacy.

Once Regina finished changing, she walked over to the table and eyed the long hollow reed that was intended to administer the medicine she required. Her body started to shake gently, and Emma got up immediately and put her arms around the smaller woman. "I promise you it looks worse than it is. Come on, let's get you settled in bed okay?"

"I have no desire to go through with this Emma."

"I know, but I'm proud of you for trusting me enough to go through with it anyway." Emma led the brunette back to the large bed in the center of the room and called for Gabrielle. She sat down behind Regina and put her arms around her, holding the woman's side to her chest. "Don't watch, it makes it worse," Emma said and kissed the woman on the crown of her head. Her hands were stroking through dark locks and whispering soothing reassurances to her friend. She noted how the woman melted into her gentle encouragement as if she were starved for the comfort and instantly felt her heart beat harder for the Mayor. The last few days her wild imagination spun up causality situations that would explain the young Queen's demeanor. For days the Sheriff had worried and
considered how the hell any of it could have happened and just how the hell the woman survived.

A soft gasp and a flinch, followed by a few tears the blonde quickly wiped from the woman's cheek, and they were done. It took several moments longer before the Queen lost consciousness this time, and although Emma had been expecting it, it still unnerved her.

Once the bag was empty, Gabrielle cleaned up her supplies. She put a hand on the Sheriff's shoulder and told her to get some rest, "Tomorrow is a new day. Hopefully, we get our Regina back."

"She's getting better," Emma said sadly, not moving a muscle holding her unconscious friend in her arms. "She is getting better..." Emma said again to an empty room.
Chapter 18

Emma wasn't sure how long she sat and held her friend for. It could have been fifteen minutes; it could have been three hours. Although she had minimal interaction with the young Queen Regina, this persona the woman took on was harder on Emma than handling the younger inquisitive version of her friend. She was afraid to ask questions, not because she thought the Queen would be upset and not answer, but of what the answer to her question would ultimately be. She had been around plenty of children who were used and abused by their parents, fosters or close family. She knew the signs, she knew those looks and to see them in her friend broke something deep inside of her.

She thought back when she first met the Mayor, before she knew she was the Evil Queen, before she knew the treachery and depths of the woman's darkness, she remembered how grateful she was that Regina Mills adopted her child. She remembered how messed up she thought he was and thought that perhaps it was her own screwed up genes that caused that in him and how lucky he was to have a mother who was so dedicated to him. She imagined the strength of his adoptive mother and was happy he had that influence. A tiny part of her felt a little jealous she hadn't been as fortunate, but still felt grateful for his sake.

She finally got up and carefully laid Regina down and covered her up. She added a couple of logs to the fire and did a sweep of the hut for anything that could be used as a weapon. She had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach that she wouldn't be escaping the clutches of the Evil Queen this trip and wanted to be sure her Regina would remain safe.

She sat back down and looked down at the mayor and was confident that if the little brunette were to try and fight her way anywhere that she could physically control her. Probably.

Not that the woman hadn't surprised her in the past.

She thought about the night she got a sore jaw and a dead boss. The harsh words she spoke to the Mayor that night stung in retrospect, and she brushed a few dark strands away from the woman's face. She'd been in a different headspace then and saw the woman an enemy because that was precisely how the Mayor treated her. An intrusion. A tiresome bother. Someone who was the cause of her problems. Those perceptions shaped the way Emma handled herself with the self-important mayor and not all of their interactions made her feel proud. She smiled when she remembered going back in time and seeing her friend in all of her Evil Queen glory; then memories of the dirty dungeon she was in awaiting execution surfaced and her smile faded. She lifted the blanket around the Mayor a little tighter, tucking her in before she got up to get changed.

Emma went around the room extinguishing lights and then settled down on the cot against the wall next to the main bed. The fireplace was the only light source left in the room, and the light highlighted the outline of her friend's face. Emma admired the soft curves of the woman's lips and the little dip of the bridge of her nose. Her peaceful features more beautiful than Emma ever could recall them being before. With a deep sigh she closed her eyes and attempted to get some sleep, she feared the next few days would be taxing on her reserves, and she would need her strength.

As soon as there was movement from Regina's bed, Emma awoke with a jolt. The Queen groaned out groggily, and Emma was instantly at her side. Light from the day had already started to warm up this world and Emma thought that perhaps it was close to mid-morning.

The Queen groaned once more and pulled herself from the drug-hazed sleep she found herself in.
"Don't try and move too much, can I get you some water?"

Regina's dark eyes took in her surroundings, and as Emma expected, confusion was followed by anger, "Where am I?"

"Calm down. You are safe Regina."

"That is a little familiar don't you think peasant?" Regina barked.

Emma rolled her eyes internally and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. She silently prayed for a coffee fairy and sighed inwardly knowing she was going to need super strength patience today.

"I'm sorry Your Majesty," Emma placated and gritted her teeth at the smug look on the Queen's face.

Regina pushed the insolent blonde back away from her and went to stand from the bed she was in, only to have her knees give out beneath her.

Emma rushed to the Queen's side and wrapped her hands around the woman's waist to steady her. "Take it easy, you're still healing Your Majesty."

"Unhand me you, oaf!" Regina wiggled out of Emma's grasp and unceremoniously flopped back down onto the bed then bellowed, "Your life shall be forfeited! Guards!"

Emma chuckled, "You're going to execute me for helping you not fall, then letting you fall to a comfortable bed only because you refused my assistance?"

"This bed is barely passable to be described as such, and I am your Queen," she said with a snarl and a curl of her lips, "your life belongs to me, and I shall do as I please with it!" On the heel of the threat, the Queen circled her hand around to summon what Emma could only assume was a fireball. The shock on her friend's face was priceless, and Emma smiled smugly.

"What's the matter Highness?"

"It's Majesty or Your Grace! I am a Queen, you uneducated fool!" Regina hissed still trying to summon her magic.

"There is no magic here, Your Grace."

"Absurd!"

"Alright well don't believe me, just don't have an aneurysm trying to summon that fireball," the blonde said with a shoulder shrug.

Regina stood, squaring her shoulders feeling a little more stable than she had when she first awoke and took an open-handed swing at the blonde before her, catching nothing but air as Emma anticipated the move and leaned away from her.

Emma reached out and grabbed the wrist of the Queen and spun her around encircling the brunette in her strong arms. "Unhand me this instant!" The queen spat as she tried to force her way out of the ever-tightening grip. She struggled against the blonde for several seconds before calming herself, finally realizing she couldn't overpower the tall girl who held her captive.

"Are you done?" Emma asked sharply, her annoyance with this side of Regina apparent.

"I demand to know where we are!" Emma loosened her grip and let the Queen go. Regina ripped
herself away from the arms of the blonde in a show of dissatisfaction.

Emma raised her voice to her friend in frustration. "Listen! You need to lose the attitude because you've been awake all of five minutes and I'm already over it!"

"How dare you-"

"Oh, I dare, Your Majesty." Emma replied with skillful bravado. The way Regina Mills could push buttons was legendary, and with that reminder, she took a deep breath and said, "Look! I know you don't think you know me, but you do! We are friends!"

The brunette hissed, "Lies!"

Emma rolled her eyes and continued to explain the best she could their dynamic and the queen's current situation leaving out big details like the fact she was Snow White's daughter, and she was what broke the woman's curse, you know, big stuff.

"I have allies not friends, and they are allies of convenience, nothing more! I see nothing you could offer me, peasant! So again I say, LIES!" Regina shouted.

"Believe what you want. Are you thirsty?" Emma asked flippantly completely ignoring the fact that the little brunette was yelling at her.

Regina huffed and folded her arms over her chest and looked away.

"I'll take that as a yes." Emma walked to the table and poured the Queen a cup of water, keeping the woman in her peripheral vision the entire time.

Regina was looking around the room, and her features pulled into a tight scowl, her arms folded defensively. When Emma held out the cup for the Queen to take, the woman looked at her as if she were mad. "What's the matter? It's water," Emma asked curiously.

"Where shall I start?" the Queen snapped.

"Preferably somewhere logical."

"Alright then," Regina snarled, "I awake from a clearly drug-induced unconsciousness to a strange place with an unkempt imbecile, stripped of my magic," she waved her hands over her body, "AND my clothing!" She folded her arms back over her chest in an attempt to cover herself from the green set of eyes watching her every move and continued, "and you expect me to consume whatever you offer me? Do you take me for a fool?"

Emma sighed and set the cup down on the end table, "Fine." She cringed to herself for what she was about to do, using a known fear against her friend, "You need to stay hydrated my Queen, If you refuse to drink, I will be forced to use an IV."

Regina scoffed, "Whatever an eye vee is dear, give me your worst. The likes of you do not frighten me!"

Emma turned around and sat back at the table in their room and explained, "An IV is a way to deliver fluids into your bloodstream by way of a long thin needle," her eyes flick up knowingly to meet the wide brown eyes of her friend. "We insert the needle into your arm and hydrate you that way."

Emma resisted the smirk as Regina promptly sat down on the edge of the bed and picked up the
cup, sniffing it before tasting a small amount, and then downing the contents.

"That's my girl. More?" Emma asked not quite as smugly as she felt. The Queen shot a scowl at the blonde's praise, but the sharp nod made Emma bring over the pitcher to refill the cup.

"Where are we?" the Queen asked after her third refill.

"We are in a village in another kingdom. You are ill and are here to recover."

"It seems highly unlikely that I would grace a commoner such as yourself with my care and well being. Now tell me the truth!" The Queen's eyes blazed with anger, but Emma could see the woman was frightened as to her predicament. She suspected the anger Regina was exhibiting was due to the fear she felt. As the Evil Queen, the woman was unaccustomed to being defenseless. Emma rolled her eyes and shook her head. "That is the truth, Your Majesty. Believe what you will."

She waved off the brunette as if she were inconsequential and the queen roared, "Don't you dare dismiss me! I am your QUEEN!"

Emma wasn't exactly shocked at the woman's behavior; however, the sudden outburst did startle her, and before she had the chance to respond there was a knock at the door. She silently wished for it to be Xena as she made her way to the front of the hut. When she opened the door, a smiling Amazon Queen greeted cheerfully, "Hi! Is everything alright?" Emma nodded and ushered Gabrielle into the living area.

"How is she?"

"Awake," Emma grumbled and Gabrielle chuckled.

"I could hear that she's awake Emma."

Emma led the bard into the bedroom to find the Queen was kneeling on top of the table trying, unsuccessfully, to open the window.

"They don't open Your Grace," Emma deadpanned startling the brunette who froze mid yank. As gracefully as she could, she got down off of the table and glared at the new blonde standing next to the one she was already familiar with.

"Your Majesty, this is Gabrielle, Queen of the Amazons. Gabrielle, meet the Evil Queen," Emma motioned her hand between the two women and caught a flash of hurt in her friend's eyes quickly before the stone mask of the Queen went back up, fire smoldering within her black eyes.

Gabrielle looked at Emma questioningly and then nodded a silent greeting towards Regina feeling the tension in the room and not liking it one bit.

"Queen of the Amazons?" Regina questioned looking down her nose at the stocky, muscular woman barely clothed before her.

"How are you feeling today Regina," Gabrielle asked ignoring the posed question.

"Trapped," the woman replied curtly. "I wish to return to my kingdom at once."

Gabrielle's green eyes flicked towards Emma who just stood shaking her head. She turned back and addressed the Queen before her. "Alright well, we can talk about it once you recover. Are you feeling pain anywhere?"
"Acutely," The Evil Queen replied looking disgusted towards Emma.

Gabrielle stepped closer to the brunette and sought permission to check the woman's vitals.

"I do not require medical attention!" the brunette barked pulling away from the bard.

"She's fine Gabby, she was a little unsteady when she first got up but seeing she was just plotting her escape on top of the table, she probably just needs to eat, and she'll be alright."

"I am a prisoner am I not?" Regina spat at the ill-mannered blonde.

"You are not," Gabrielle replied for the Sheriff.

"But, you can't go home just yet either," Emma interjected as the queen opened her mouth to demand being brought home immediately, "You're ill Regina."

"My health is of no concern to either of you!" the Queen barked growing more and more agitated by the set of circumstances she found herself in.

Emma took a deep breath and silently counted to five in her head then turned to the bard. "It is a little chilly today for a sundress, do you think we could get Her Majesty here some pants or something?"

"Do not speak on my behalf wench!"

Both blondes ignored the outburst and Gabrielle nodded with a tight smile. "I'll have someone bring over something suitable immediately. Have her take it easy and get something to eat. Would you like additional help?" She motioned to the door indicating more of a guarded presence.

"No, I can handle her." Emma looked back at the woman who was standing glaring at the two women who dared discuss her as if she were not even there. If looks could kill both Gabrielle and herself would be dead for certain. She turned away from the Queen and ushered Gabrielle back towards the front of the hut. "Forty-Eight hours. I can do forty-eight hours," Emma mumbled under her breath. "Hey any news from Xena?" she asked realizing Regina and herself were not the only problems on the blonde Queen's mind that day.

"She hasn't reported back in yet. I'll be sure to let you know if anything happens Emma. Just take care of your queen," Gabrielle replied with a warm smile. "Let the guard know if you need anything."

"I'm going to take her to the bath... uh... cave thing... a little later," Emma informed. "I uh... just before we gave her the last dose, I told the Queen Regina a little bit about what is going on. It made things much easier to deal with. She is so damn stubborn! I mean, I'm sure the Evil Queen won't believe me even if I tried to explain to her, but how much can I tell her? Like how much and still be safe?"

"Oh honey, I don't know." Gabrielle worried her brow and her lip, her green eyes darted back toward the back room then looked back to Emma. "You're right though. She probably won't believe you anyway. Stick to just telling her she's ill for now." Gabrielle lifted her chin towards the bedroom. "She's back on the table. Have fun with that!" the Amazon Queen turned on her heel with a devilish grin and left the hut.

Emma huffed her displeasure and marched back into the bedroom.
Chapter 19

The Queen of the Amazons sat upon a multi-horned leather covered throne at the center of a horseshoe-shaped circle of thrones that made up the elders of the tribe when they were in council. She sat with a small pile of scouting reports and read over each one with scrutiny. Gabrielle enjoyed the quiet of the council tent when she needed to focus on the ceaseless scrollwork that was lording over the Amazon nation.

Her queen regent, Ephiny entered the chamber and dutifully saluted her before coming to kneel before her. "Queen Gabrielle!" she addressed, "It has been several nights, and Xena has not sent word. We should assume what she's found has hostile intent to the nation and something has happened to her! I seek permission to take a contingent of warriors after her for rescue or revenge!"

Gabrielle smiled down at her friend and rolled the scroll she was studying up and replied softly, "Request denied Ephiny."

"But Majesty!"

"If, and that is a big if, anyone has captured Xena, it is certainly intentional. Don't worry Eph. She's fine."

"I know you trust in her abilities my Queen, but…"

"But, trust in me. If she doesn't send word in a couple more days, then I'll start to worry. Has there been any more instances of violence on the border?"

"Only what has been reported."

"Alright, well then, double our drills, just because I believe Xena is alright, doesn't mean her delay doesn't concern me for our well being. Pull Poni off Emma duty and have her assist you with the younglings. We need everyone in top condition."

"Yes, my Queen!" Ephiny stood and saluted quickly before retreating from the tent to perform the task presented to her by her sovereign.

"You better be alright Warrior Princess or so help me…” the bard whispered under her breath.

Emma escorted a moderately more agreeable Regina up to the Queen's personal bath. Once Gabrielle left that morning, the Sheriff had a little attitude adjustment discussion with the Evil Queen and was pleasantly surprised that Regina seemingly fell into line. They managed to have a relatively peaceful, albeit quiet, breakfast within the room and Emma suggested a calming bath for the woman.

Emma noted that the security detail had been pulled and assumed the Amazons were in need of the extra woman power. She continued to lead the brunette up the hill towards the bathing cave making a mental note to ask Eponin if she could help out. She silently watched Regina meticulously as the woman scrutinized the village. "It's quite different than what you are used to, yes Your Majesty?"

"Indeed," came the curt reply. "I am royalty. I am unaccustomed to living in squalor."

Emma continued, ignoring her companion's snarky remark, "So after your bath, would you like to
do something?"

Brown eyes side glanced the blonde but didn't answer.

"Okay well, we can go watch the warriors do drills or something. Just think about it okay?"

The Queen noted the blonde lost the smile she had when they left their hovel and huffed in response and strutted towards what appeared to be a cavern in the side of a mountain. The blonde entered the mouth of the cave but turned when she realized Regina wasn't following her.

"What's wrong now?" Emma softened her features as she saw the look of concern on her friend's face. "It's safe... you'll like it... it's the queen's baths. I promise it's fine. Come on," she coaxed the reluctant woman into the dimly lit cave. Emma grabbed the first torch that was lit and followed the procedure for lighting the way as she has seen Eponin do on several occasions.

Regina followed behind the blonde girl dressed in a curious leather outfit she saw on almost all the women in view between the hut and the cave, including their queen. Barbarians. The Evil Queen wrinkled her nose in disgust. She scanned over the set up within the cave. It appeared as though an underground stream fed it and seemingly heated from a natural spring deep beneath the hollowed out basin.

Emma set down the towels and bathing supplies for her friend and turned to face Regina. The brunette plastered a wide grin upon her face as she stepped closer to the awkward blonde. "Will you be attending to all of my needs girl?" Regina asked seductively, and just as she had hoped, the dark green eyes grew wide as if she were prey in the clutches of a predator. She licked her lips and took a moment to admire the pleasing attributes of the woman before her.

"Uh..." Emma slowly backed herself up against a wall as the Queen stepped closer and closer into her personal space. The brunette ran her open palms down over the blonde's muscular shoulders and chuckled, black eyes taking in the pale woman's features.

"I do believe I am terribly dirty," Regina continued in a low husky voice. "A good friend would help with that would they not?" the brunette batted her eyelashes innocently and dragged her finger down the long pale neck of the Savior settling between her visibly pert breasts.

"I... uh... think you're good," Emma ducked under the Queen's arm to escape the woman's literal clutches. She quickly walked to the mouth of the cave and turned around hesitantly. "You are good, right?"

The Queen lifted the shift she had on up and over her head, standing in the brilliant nude she deadpanned to the blonde, "The best."

Emma slammed her eyes shut and quickly spun around to retreat from the room, bumping into the cave wall before opening her eyes once again to gather her bearings. The Queen's taunting chuckle echoed off of the cave walls as she walked away. Emma rolled her eyes at herself which was followed by an onslaught of beratement for letting the Evil Queen get to her.

The acting leader of the Centaur Nation showed up at the Amazon village to discuss with Queen Gabrielle their current diplomatic circumstances. Attacks on Centaur villages across the valley had the king concerned, and with what was found at the destroyed human villages Gabrielle knew she needed to open dialogue with them sooner rather than later. Phantes was young but progressive in the ways he viewed the world and Gabrielle was grateful she would be dealing with him rather than his father who could often resort back to old ways of thinking.
There was tension between the hoofed men and the Amazons for years before Gabrielle took over control of the nation, but she had brokered peace between the peoples and both sides had prospered under the new trade agreements. It was, in fact, the centaur villages that bordered the Amazon territory that was attacked which lead her lover away to investigate. The warrior princess felt as though she owed them, and perhaps she did. Whenever they called, she always assisted. The centaurs took her son Solan into their tribe. Xena had Solan during her reign of terror and feared the boy would be in danger if people knew of his existence, so she sent him away.

At the time the centaurs were her enemies, but the boy's father was a hero to them, and so the leader took the son of Boriais, savior to the centaurs, and raised him as if he were his own. Xena knew no one would ever think the boy was her kin, not being raised by her enemies, not even the boy himself.

Once Xena started doing good, she maintained a tentative alliance with them, and so Gabrielle got to know them, finding the stereotypes and rumors her people believed about the men to be grossly inaccurate. She was more than happy to broker peace, and once the two tribes stopped fighting amongst each other, they were able to stand strong as a united front against common enemies.

Common enemies like the mystery raiders who slaughtered a handful of villages near both nation's territories.

During their meeting, Gabrielle discovered the Centaur villages that were hit were most likely purposely targeted for their connections the nation had to the outside world. They relied on these connections and Gabrielle knew that couldn't be a coincidence. She stood over the map table and looked at the correlation between the villages. No one knew who did it, but in the centaur village it was made to look like it was Amazons and in the human village it was made to look like Centaurs.

"This is the area she was heading," she said pointing to the valley nestled between the territories.

"We came to the same conclusion," the tall, soft-spoken blond replied.

"One of our patrols came back with one of these…" he tossed a silver mask onto the table then met Gabrielle's gaze.

"By the gods," she gasped, covering her mouth in shock.

Emma sat on a grassy patch of earth next to the opening of the cave waiting patiently for Regina to finish up her bath. It was taking her forever, but Emma didn't dare go back in there with her all wet, and naked and seductive. So she waited. And waited.

Gabrielle came up the hill towards her, and she quickly stood, half-heartedly saluting like she has seen the other amazons do a million times.

"You're not one of my subjects Emma," the blonde Queen chuckled.

"No, but… you're still the Queen, you know?"

"Yeah, for the moment," Gabrielle smirked and then pointed towards the cave, "Is she in there with a guard?"

"No. Well, yeah she is in there, but no, there was no guard posted. She's good though." Emma shrugged her shoulders and then grumbled, "Taking her sweet ass time."

Concern struck the bard when she asked, "How long has she been in there?"
"I don't know at least an hour," Emma noted the confused look on the Queen's face and tried hard to think what kind of time measurement they used in the Xenaverse, "A while."

Without a word, Gabrielle rushed passed Emma and entered the cave. "Emma!" the bard exclaimed and Emma charged in herself.

"Wha-?" Emma looked around the cave and didn't see Regina anywhere. The clothes, towels, and bathing supplies were exactly where Emma had left them, and she looked down into the still water, hoping beyond hope she didn't see a lifeless body.

"Where-?" She looked up at Gabrielle for answers, but the bard was already on her way out of the cave. Emma followed behind her still in shock.

"Guard!" the Queen shouted powerfully, and several armed warriors met her at the bottom of the hill. Gabrielle barked orders to assemble the search party, "You may do what is necessary to detain her, but she is not to be harmed! Dismissed!"

"How-?" Emma worried her brow and fought tears as true fear struck her. Fear and beratement that she couldn't keep the woman safe for an hour!

"The spring feed opens up to another cave on the other side of the wall which leads out to a relatively straight shot to the hill base on the other side. So we have a place to start. It's going to be dark, and she will be wet we need to find her!" Gabrielle said handing Emma an unlit torch and a flint. "Come on!"
Regina shivered as she quickly ran barefoot through the thick forest. The bottoms of her feet were already cut open and bleeding, but she kept going. She would go until she happened upon a village and would make her way home!

*There is no way I'm going to let those brutes murder me simply because that wretched Snow White has turned my people against me!*

It was getting dark, and she was just then starting to think perhaps she was too hasty when she found a means of escape and leaped at the chance to run.

*These kidnappers clearly think by keeping me fed and warm that I will show leniency upon them when I am ransomed back to my people. HA! As if the kingdom will pay a cold gold piece to get their evil queen back! I will not be taken out and put down like a rabid animal!*

Regina stumbled through the thick brush; branches scraped and drew blood on her thighs and arms. She only thought to bring the thin shift she put back on once the blonde left her alone after her exploration of the bottom of the bath. The water was hot the closer to the bottom she traveled but once she found the large enough to swim through tunnel she hadn't thought twice about her attire. She saw freedom and grasped for it.

She was now paying the consequences for such a hasty decision. She broke through the brush and landed unceremoniously on her ass at the edge of a clearing. The very first thing she noticed was how bright it was for nighttime. The tall grass that lined and covered the floor of the clearing was lit in a silvery hue. She looked up in amazement to see two enormous planetary bodies that resembled nothing the small moon from her home. This drastic change struck fear within the Queen, and she stumbled back in awe.

She heard the tell-tale bubbling of a brook nearby and crouched down in the grass to make her way towards it. She laid down on her stomach and lifted the clean, cool water to her parched lips and greedily drank it in. She noticed a small round dark purple reflection in the water and looked up to see a third moon. "What is this trickery?" The Queen whispered to herself.

*An entire land without magic? Is that even possible?*

Regina sat back on her knees, circled her chilled arms around herself and considered her options. The blonde woman could have been telling the truth.

"Impossible! No one would be friends with the Evil Queen! That's what she called you!" she spat, the girl's words still stung deep inside.

She heard her name echo out in the night. "RAAAAHHHH GEEEEEEEENAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

Regina snapped back to the threat at hand and pushed herself to get up and run. *Run for her life.*

The Queen jumped to her feet and ran away from where the voice was coming. She ran hard and fast and found herself back in the thick of the woods once more. She ran until she could no longer bear the agony of her abused feet for another second. Falling to her knees, she growled in frustration. The panic-stricken voice was calling her name, drawing ever closer. She snarled at her predicament and looked around her for something she could use as a weapon.
"I will not be held captive by anyone for any reason in any land!"

She grabbed a fist-sized rock and climbed up into a tree, putting to use her upper body strength she managed to secure a place out of sight and waited for the annoying blonde hot on her trail.

Emma circled the clearing along the edge, and she heard twigs snapping in the dead silence of the night. The light the moons provided was much appreciated as she traveled through the woods. She jogged over to the creek and filled her water skin. In the quiet, she heard rustling and took out her sword and jogged towards the noise. Her mind rattled off a list of nightmarish things the rustling could be and shuttered at the thought that any one of the numerous unearthly things from the tv show it could actually be and slowed her step with caution.

She saw the broken twigs of something that had pushed its way through the brush, and she tentatively stepped through the already broken path that led back into the forest. She carefully lit her torch and slowly stepped around keeping her eyes and ears open and made her way into the woods.

"Raaa geee naaaaaahhh!" She quickened her step as she thought that perhaps one of those imagined monsters could cross the path of her queen. Her heart sped up, and she shouted the woman's name again. She jogged cautiously, but quickly, deeper into the thick forest. She thought she heard something ahead of her, so she stopped dead and listened once more to her surroundings.

A large rock grazed her shoulder scraping her flesh and landed with a thick thud at her feet. Emma whipped around and then looked up when she heard broken bark slip off the branch directly above her. "R'Gina?" She asked and pushed her torch a bit closer to the tree in question hoping beyond hope it was the Queen and not some monster.

The orange of the flame reflected off dark eyes, and Emma could see a very dirty, bruised and bloodied woman. She sheathed her sword and let out a sigh of relief.

"Oh thank god! What are you doing?" She was met with a vibrantly bright sneer that could be easily seen in the dimly lit tree. "You must be freezing, come on, get down from there." Emma sighed as a considerable weight of relief lifted off of her. She found her. Alive.

Regina curled up closer to the tree trunk and scowled.

"What's wrong? Come on. I've got water…” Emma enticed as she shook the water skin and flashed the woman a grin.

"No! I will not be put down like a dog!"

"What?"

"When my kingdom doesn't give you your ransom you will put me to death!"

"I didn't kidnap you, Regina!"

The brunette started to protest, but Emma put up her hand to silence the tirade. "I didn't kidnap you! And I have no intention of killing you! I'll admit I haven't given you all of the details of what is going on, but it is for your own good! Now Regina Mills, get out of that tree right this instant!"

Never in my wildest dreams would I ever have imagined ever saying that phrase ever in my life.

The brunette shifted nervously on the branch and Emma could see the woman was shivering.
"Come on. I'll start a fire and get you warmed up, okay your majesty?" The blonde softened her tone and looked up at the woman, holding the torch up to see and placing her free hand on her hip.

"I-" Regina shifted nervously again.

"What's wrong?"

"I can't get down."

"You got up there!"

"Well it seems we've discovered that climbing up is easier than climbing down, haven't we?" the Queen shot back.

"Okay. Hang on." Emma looked around where she could safely place the torch and came back to stand at the bottom of the tree. "Alright!" She held her hands up, "Jump."

"Are you mad? I'm not jumping from this height!"

"No. It's cool. I'll catch you. You can't just stay in the tree, jump." Emma held out her arms and waved the woman some encouragement. Regina bit her bottom lip nervously and grabbed hold of the branch above her and gingerly slid off the branch she sat on.

Emma slid her hands up Regina's calves as they dangled helplessly above her. The brunette's butt slid off the branch completely and as her weight was distributed onto the branch above her the Queen panicked and let go one of her arms to grab the branch she had been seated upon only to lose her grip on her remaining hand and swung down crashing into Emma. Both women landed on the ground, Emma flat on her back and the queen firmly in place on top.

"You IDIOT!" Regina sat up and grabbed her scraped, bloodied shin.

Emma thudded her head back against the forest floor and groaned, "Okay. Get off me!"

"I may as well have jumped for all the help you provided!" The Queen complained still sitting atop Emma's hips.

"And you're welcome." Emma knelt up on her elbows and looked over the scrapes along her friend's thighs.

"For what?" Regina demanded loudly.

"For letting you land on me!" Emma yelled back at her.

"You said you would catch me!" the Queen insisted.

"Well nobody told you to climb up in the damn tree, to begin with, not to mention running off in the first place!" Emma wrapped her hands around Regina's upper arms to try and push the woman back off of her so she could get up. "Jesus Regina! You're freezing!" Emma dropped her attitude immediately as she geared up into protect-Regina-mode. "Okay, hang on, I'll get a fire started quick, okay?" Emma rummaged around and found a large dead tree branch she was able to chop easily through with her sword. She brought it back to where she left Regina still sitting on the forest floor. Emma piled the wood and lit it with the torch. "Well it's not as pretty as Gabrielle makes, but it'll do," Emma said aloud with a grin, then remembered Regina wasn't Regina. With that thought, her face fell, and smile faded.
The fire roared to life, and Emma sat down behind the Queen and wrapped her arms and legs around her using her body heat to help the woman get warm.

"Are you bleeding?" Emma asked and motioned to the Queen's shins.

"Of course I am!"

Emma rolled her eyes, "Okay, we'll get you fixed up back at the village."

"Why would you care to heal me?" the brunette in her arms spat, and Emma flinched.

"I didn't kidnap you," the blonde said quietly. "You really think your kingdom wouldn't pay a ransom for you?"

"Don't be stupid, of course they wouldn't! I am their villainized Queen. That wretched girl saw to that!"

"Snow White, you mean?"

"Who else?"

Emma sat quietly for a moment and reflected on that. "I'm sorry I called you the Evil Queen this morning when I introduced you to Gabrielle. I was irritated, and I didn't mean it," she said with sincerity.

"What do I care what you peasants call me? I know the truth."

"I know the truth too, and I'm sorry okay?"

"What truth do you think you know, girl?"

"It's Emma, in case you've forgotten, and I know quite a bit about you. We've been friends for some time."

"Well Em-ma, Since I sincerely doubt you are being truthful with me, I can only assume that you know nothing of what my life has been!"

"Perhaps not everything, but what I do know is that there is more to the story than what is told. Evil isn't born Regina. It's made."

Regina humphed her response with a petulant scowl. She sat stiffly in the blonde's arms and shivered. Emma rubbed her hands over the Queen's exposed arms in an attempt to speed up the warming process. After several moments the queen relaxed a little bit and pushed into Emma's embrace. Her feet were starting to regain feeling, and she realized they were damaged extensively.

Emma noticed the Queen was fidgeting and wincing in pain. "What's the matter? Are you alright?" She looked over Regina's shoulder to see what the problem was.

"God Regina!" Emma exclaimed at the state of her friend's battered feet.

"You continually test the limits of my benevolence girl!" the Queen snapped.

"Oh get over yourself! I'd say it serves you right for running off into the wild forest in nothing but a nightgown, but those bloodied feet happen to belong to my best friend!" Emma reached over to grab the water skin and gently cleaned out the wounds.
"Ow! You oaf! That stings!"

"Of course it does, you've got some really deep lacerations, Your Majesty. You're going to need stitches," Emma said moving the woman's foot around in the dim light of the fire. "You can't walk on this," she finally sighed and contemplated how the hell she was going to carry the woman back to the village. Could she just wait it out and hope one of the other search parties find them? She'd easily gotten separated from her own group, and now they were both several hours trek from the village. She felt the clammy woman in her arms and knew they didn't have time just to wait it out. She left herself a trail and had studied the topography since she's been there. No, they needed to get the Queen back soon.

They sat in silence as Regina started to warm up. Finally, the brunette cleared her throat and asked, "If we are friends, Em-ma, how did we meet?"

Emma chuckled, "Oh so we are ready to try on the truest believer hat, are we? Henry would be so proud!"

Emma felt the woman stiffen and her head whip around, "What do you know of my father?!"

"Henry isn't your father, Henry is your son," Emma said with a smile. "Our son actually."

"We have a child together?! I would never lower myself-"

"Keep dreamin' lady. We do share him though."

"That is the most preposterous thing I've ever heard in my entire life!" Regina said as she turned her nose into the air.

"Your mother ripped people's hearts out for fun! And having a kid with me is the most preposterous thing you've ever heard?"

"I can not have children! So yes!" Regina sneered.

Emma's mind cranked into overdrive.

I can try harder… I can cry less… Queen Regina's words came back to her and Emma tried not to imagine the worst. In her shock, she asked, "Did the King hurt yo-"

"No!" The brunette snapped, "I did it to myself! My mother planned on making me a baby mill then killing me off so she can seize control of my kingdom!"

"Oh my god!" Emma gasped in both horror and shock. "Jesus Regina! I never knew! That woman-"

"No!" The brunette snapped, "I did it to myself! My mother planned on making me a baby mill then killing me off so she can seize control of my kingdom!"

"Oh my god!" Emma gasped in both horror and shock. "Jesus Regina! I never knew! That woman-" Emma bit her tongue and rested her forehead against the damp cloth of Regina's back. Just as Regina was about to quip some snarky comment to berate the blonde, Emma pulled back and let out an agonized yell startling the brunette to silence.

Emma stood up and started to pace; she drew her sword from her sheath and started flicking it around skillfully. She pulled back and chopped away at a nearby bush yelling her frustrations at the top of her lungs. The Queen sat and watched the woman lose her composure right before her very eyes.

"Who fucking does that to their kid?" She grunted out as she bashed the blade against the thin branches of the bush. "SHE WAS YOUR MOTHER!" Emma yelled into the night. "She never fucking loved you! You were always just a means to an end, and I fucking hate her! I hate her for what she did to you!" Emma's shoulders fell in defeat, she sheathed her sword and collapsed back
down onto her knees next to the stunned Queen. She lifted the brunette's chin and looked intently into her eyes. "I'm sorry..." Emma bit back the flood of emotions and the rest of what she wanted to say to the Queen... to her Queen. Now was not the time.

Regina pulled her chin from the blonde's grasp petulantly, "So you see Emma, your trickery won't work with me. I know you are lying. I do not have a son."

Emma sighed and collapsed her features further, and she continued to argue logic to the woman who refused to listen to reason. "I gave birth to him, but he is as much yours as he is mine. You changed his diapers and cared for him when he was sick and when he is scared he always asks for you because you are his mom." Emma settled down next to the silently contemplative brunette and wrapped her arm around the woman who began to shiver once more.

"I share him with you?" the Queen asked after a few moments.

"Yeah."

"I don't share."

"Well you care about him, and he wants me in his life, so you kinda put up with it."

"Well, that doesn't sound like me at all!" Regina shook her head, "No what sounds like me would be to kill you off making it look like an accident then I would have my son to myself without sharing."

"Yeah you tried that, you ended up hurting Henry instead so you kinda just started to tolerate me, and eventually we became friends," Emma smirked when Regina rolled her eyes. "So do you believe me?" the blonde asked hopefully.

"No, but it is a nice fairy tale, Emma," Regina sighed.

"Alright well, I still didn't kidnap you," Emma mumbled. "Will you at least stop trying to run away? I don't want to have to put you in the brig, please don't make me do that," Emma pleaded with emotion thick in her voice. Regina thought about it and decided that she didn't want to reside in a jail cell, so she nodded in silent agreement.

"We are in another realm aren't we?" Regina asked. Emma nodded as she ran her fingers through Regina's drying hair, "We need to start heading back, you're dry enough." Emma stood and relit the torch then kicked dirt onto the fire to put it out. "Come on, climb up on my back, you can't walk on those feet. I'll carry you."

"I am perfectly capable." Regina started to rise and winced in pain as she stood.

"I'm sure you are, but those are my friend's feet and believe me when I say this, Your Majesty, she'll be pissed if you give her an infection so bad she loses one of them. Now, get on, you get to hold the torch." Emma leaned over and Regina climbed up awkwardly, wrapping her legs around the blonde's midsection. Regina's arm wrapped around Emma's upper chest and she took possession of the torch.

Emma huffed and started back towards the Amazon village.
Chapter 21

A couple of hours later, Emma was having difficulty sticking to the trail and the Queen on her back was starting to shiver once again.

Emma grunted, "Okay. Break time!" Regina set her less damaged foot down, and the Sheriff guided her to a seated position. She could hear Regina's teeth chattering, and she knew much more of this the woman would get sick for sure. "Alright look. I'm having problems seeing where we are going. I'm going to build a fire, and we are going to wait until morning to continue."

Regina uncharacteristically did not snap at the blonde and Emma knew then the Queen was worse off than she was letting on. She quickly gathered up some wood and started another fire. She knelt and picked up the small brunette and cradled her in her arms next to the fire.

"Other than the scratches and your feet, are you feeling pain anywhere Regina?" Emma felt the woman's head which felt a little warm. Regina nodded her head silently against the blonde's chest. "Where?" Emma prodded.

"I just feel achy, everywhere."

Oh god, that could be fever...

"Take some more water." Emma held the water skin up to the brunette's uncharacteristically pale lips and coaxed her to drink.

Please don't get sick...

"Try and get some rest. I've got you," Emma whispered into the Queen's crown.

Ruby Lucas had practically moved into the Charming's loft, and while David had his hands full running both the mayor's office and the sheriff's station, Ruby tended to Henry, filled in at the station and cared for Snow. She had given her leave at Granny's for an indefinite amount of time a couple of weeks back and took to filling in at the station by answering phones when David had the town to run.

The random portal catastrophe made major news within the first week since Emma's bug took the big plunge to who knows where and almost all the calls to the station were portal related. David had a council meeting that afternoon and needed Ruby to cover the phones down at the station while he attended. They made an announcement to the general public of their limited knowledge about the portals and gave out practical advice when townsfolk encountered them. For the most part, any seen were out around the mine area and presumably the forest beyond. However, they lost seven townsfolk due to curiosity or sheer accident, and the council wanted answers. Answers David didn't have.

"I can't take the phones tonight, Granny needs me," Ruby said standing with her hands on her hips waiting for the argument that would inevitably follow.

"Waitressing is more important than public safety Red? Really?" David scowled and folded his arms over his chest.

"The last resident to go missing was one of Granny's girls! She is an old lady and can't waitress herself!"
"Have her close up! I need you," the blond said flippantly.

"And have the town panic because Granny's is closed? David, Granny's doesn't even close on holidays!" Red countered.

"We don't celebrate this realm's holidays anyway, what does it matter?" David reminded her haughtily.

"It matters because it is public perception. If things they rely on start changing, people will start to panic! Just reroute the phones to your cell. Henry can show you how. The council knows you are doing both Regina and Emma's jobs, they'll understand!"

"They want solutions Red! Solutions that I don't have! I am not the savior! I was never a king I was a shepherd! I have no idea how or why these portals are opening up or how the heck we are going to stop them!" He leaned his open palms against the counter and hung his head.

"Heck? Really, Charming?" Ruby smiled wide trying to add levity to calm the clearly agitated blond.

"Stow it Red," David grumbled knowing she was trying to defuse him.

"Well it's been a bit, and the Blue Fairy has come up with zilch. I think it is time to talk to the Dark One."

"Absolutely not," David folded his arms across his broad chest, he was putting his foot down about this, and she wasn't changing his mind.

"David-"

He shook his head and interrupted her, "No Ruby! He uses dark magic and any time we ask him for help we get burned!"

"If memory serves you and Snow sought out his help on more than one occasion back home! Your child is missing! Your wife is a wreck! Your town is getting sucked away one resident at a time! It is time to do something!"

"We paid the ultimate price for his help need I remind you? He masterminded the curse which ripped my child away from me hours after she was born!" he exclaimed a bit louder than he intended.

Ruby stood firm and said in a low tone, "I'm not arguing who's fault it was that my best friend didn't get to raise her kid because you really aren't going to like what I have to say about it. We need him, David."

"We don't. The fairies-"

"The fairies have no answers to even where the portals are coming from or why they are opening, let alone how to find Emma and bring her home!"

A confident knock on the door brought them both out of their increasingly heated debate. Red answered the door and smirked when she saw none other than Mr. Gold himself standing in the hall. "Mr. Gold! How lovely it is for you to stop by! Were your ears burning?" With a broad smile and a wave of her hand, she ushered the older man into the apartment, much to David's displeasure.

"What do you want Gold?" David spat, still angry from the debate.
"Well dearie, since no one is at the station to answer portal tips I decided this piece of information was important enough to make a house call."

"Thank you for coming by Mr. Gold, David and I were going to come by and see you, but it seems fate has saved us a trip," she said smugly.

"What is so important you came all the way downtown?" David grumbled.

"It seems as though King George has purposefully jumped into a portal," the man said with the hint of glee.

"What?!" David exclaimed loudly.

"David!" Ruby scolded flicking her eyes in sleeping Snow's direction and then upstairs where Henry was supposed to be doing his homework.

"Yes, I thought you would be interested in that."

"I bet he went back home to rule over his kingdom," Ruby said aloud, mostly to herself.

"Rule over what? Everyone is here!" David exclaimed.

"If my memory serves, your wife and daughter said there were people left in the Enchanted Forest after the curse took us away." Gold reminded gently. "There are bound to be stragglers."

"Pretty soon the rest of us will be joining them if we can't figure out how to stop the portals from happening," Ruby added ruefully.

"If Emma is there, she'll put a stop to anything dangerous he wants to do," David said to himself, worry over his daughter's safety paramount, but he knew she was perfectly capable of handling the likes of his would-be father.

"I do have an idea as to why they are manifesting," the imp allured.

Ruby shot a look at David and then turned her attention back to Rumple, "That's what we were coming to see you about. How do we stop them from happening?" She jumped right to the point.

"We can do nothing. The Savior needs to break the curse."

"Emma broke your damn curse!" David barked.

"Obviously not. We are still trapped here," the older man theatrically looked around the room. "The curse was only partially broken. The true love's kiss written into the curse was of a romantic," he punctuated the word with the jab of his hand, "variety. This is not what occurred."

"So her and Henry's kiss didn't break the curse?" Ruby asked incredulously.

"I'm afraid not dearie."

"So Emma needs to find her true love and break the curse and the portals will stop sucking people home?"

"You assume much Miss Lucas."

"What do you mean?" Ruby asked worrying her brow and shot a look at David who was all too quiet..
The Dark One took a deep breath, explaining anything to the likes of these heroes was taxing on his patience reserves. "All portals work the same. The portal latches onto a 'captain' if you will, the person who steers the portal. It may be the person who opens the portal or the closest person to the portal when it gets opened by other means. The portal that took the Savior and the Queen may not have gone to the Enchanted Forest at all!"

"How do we help them get back here if we don't even know where they went to!" David whispered-shouted, his face turning a shade of red and his eyes were frantic with concern.

"I have an idea about that as well, you are in luck!" the imp said with a flourish of his wrist.

"Oh, I'm sure we'll pay for it," David said under his breath, but loud enough both brunettes heard him loud and clear.

"David!" Ruby scolded once more.

Rumplestiltskin continued, ignoring the man's disdain, "There is a spell I can use to find someone in another realm, but I will need the boy's blood to track his parents."

"What do you need his blood for?!" David exclaimed horrified.

"His parent/child connection is strong-" 

"I'm her father! Use my blood!" David cut him off mid-sentence.

"I sincerely doubt it will work with you, Mr. Nolan."

"Why the hell not?" David was letting his anger grow, and Ruby put her hand on the man's forearm to calm him.

"Well if you must know, I sincerely doubt our dear Savior considers your relationship that of a parent/child at all. Oh, she cares for you, that is for certain, but not like a child does for their parent," the older man exclaimed almost amused at the limited brain capacity of the would-be prince.

"And WHO'S fault is that?"

"I do believe it was you," he pointed his finger at the Prince and said with malice, "who put your infant daughter in a tree to another realm in the care of a six-year-old wooden puppet, not I."

"Get out!" David demanded.

"David!" Ruby exclaimed.

"NO! I will NOT stand here and listen to this Ruby!" David pointed towards the door and looked the imp right in the eye, "Get out of my house!"

Rumple sneered a partial grin of satisfaction and turned to the wolf. "Bring the boy by my shop in two days time. I will make preparations for the spell." he turned to face the blonde man brooding before him, "As always Charming, it was a pleasure." Then he disappeared in a cloud of black smoke.

"Absolutely not! He is not getting his hands on my grandson's blood! No!"

"David! It is our only chance of finding Emma and helping the town!"
He folded his arms over his chest and gritted his teeth. Ruby put her hand on the blond's shoulder and said gently, "I know how much you love it when I'm right so I'm gonna do you the favor of not rubbing this one in, okay? I'm gonna go check on the kid and then go down to the diner for the dinner shift." David grumbled something she couldn't hear under his breath.

She called as she bounded up the stairs, "Hey at least you have something to tell the council!"

In the room she shared with Henry, she found the boy on the bed face down, buried in a pillow. "Hey kid, I'm taking a shift down at the diner-" She heard a muffled sniffle and froze. "Are you alright?"

The boy sobbed, "She didn't love me enough to break the curse!"

Ruby dropped her shoulders and slumped down next to the brunette boy on the bed. "Henry, what have your moms said about eavesdropping?" She put her hand on his back and rubbed circles like she's seen Regina do to him on more than one occasion.

"They say not to do it," the boy mumbled into his pillow.

"That's right. Why?" she coaxed gently.

"Because I don't get the whole story."

"Right. You broke the curse, Henry. We all have our memories now. You brought back everyone's happy endings."

He sat up and spat the words as if they were filled with the hurt he felt by them, "She doesn't love me enough to break it all the way!"

Ruby defended her friend fiercely, "Emma loves you! Don't be ridiculous! The curse just needed a certain type of true love's kiss, Hen," she explained, "The kind when two people are soul mates or something. A romantical love, understand?"

"But how is she going to do that? Hook is dead! My dad is dead! Who else is there?"

Ruby smiled at the boy, "First things first. Let's find them and get them home, then we'll worry about breaking curses."

He considered it then agreed with a deep sniffle of his nose and a wipe of his cheeks with his sleeve, "Alright."

Ruby wrinkled her nose in disgust but didn't comment on the kid's manners, "Is your homework done?"

"No," he pouted.

"Okay finish it up. I'm taking a shift down at the diner tonight, and David has a council meeting, who knows how long that'll take. There's leftover chicken in the fridge, don't make that frozen pizza that's for Saturday okay?" She looked at him, and he smirked. She pointed a finger at him and warned, "Eat the chicken!"

"Okaaaaay!" he held up his hands in surrender, "What about Grandma?"

"I'll bring her something home from the diner. Granny made soup," the wolf shrugged her shoulders aloof.
He crashed into her and hugged her tight. "Thanks for taking such good care of us, Ruby."

"No sweat kid," she held his head to her and patted his back.
Chapter 22

Henry leapt from Ruby's Mustang and ran to the front door of Mr. Gold's shop. He was all smiles and excitement at the prospect of being the one to find his mother's; he barely slept the previous night. It hadn't helped that his grandparents were up fighting to well past midnight, but in his excitement, he wouldn't have been able to sleep even if they were quiet. Ruby coaxed him into putting his earbuds in as soon as the couple started so he had no idea what happened.

Whatever they had fought over must have been big, because David opted to go into City Hall that morning instead of going with Red, Snow and himself to see the Dark One. The fact that his grandmother was up and out of the house at all was also a significant change, but he was just so pleased with helping out, he didn't want to draw attention to it.

Henry waltzed up to the counter where Mr. Gold was fiddling with some ingredients. "Ah just in time Henry," the older man exclaimed with a grin that came across as a sneer. The man was trying to accept the boy as his grandson. He was trying to put the death of his son to rest and have a relationship with Henry he never had with his boy. His darkness prevented him from caring for the child the way he knew he should, but Henry knew the man was trying and that was good enough for him.

His birth mother had explained to him once that sometimes things that seemed easy for kids, are actually quite difficult for adults to do and he should give credit for trying. So he had with Mr. Gold. He had for his adoptive mother as well, and when he did, it spurred her on to become good. She had become so good she was able to produce light magic to defeat her sister, the Wicked Witch.

The Dark One nodded to Belle who disappeared behind the curtain then reappeared seconds later with a frosty white globe. The man poured a drop of something magical on the globe which turned it a shade of purple then asked for the boy's hand. Snow stepped up behind her grandson and looked the imp in the eye, "Why are you helping us? What price are we going to pay for this?"

"I am doing what I always do, Princess. I am protecting my interests. It does not interest me to fall into a portal, or," he quickly looked from Henry to his beloved, "lose someone I love."

Snow's eyes narrowed in disbelief, choosing to believe that his motivations could be more sinister.

"It is quite painful, not knowing where your loved one is," he continued, "Not knowing if they are alive or dead. Not knowing if you'll ever see them again. I do not wish to experience that again, thank you."

Ruby put her hand on Snow's shoulder when she gasped at his words. Henry looked Snow in the eye and attempted to reassure her, "It's okay grandma. He won't hurt me. I'm his grandson too."

His hazel eyes met the older man's dark eyes, and Henry thought he saw a fleeting hint of appreciation or was that as close to love as the man could ever feel. Henry was uncertain, but he held out his hand trusting the old man to help them find his mothers.

He pierced the boy's finger on the spindle at the top of the globe, and the purple cloud within the sphere began to swirl and twist. Within seconds, the outline of continents were visible, and Henry's excitement grew until he looked up to his grandfather's face. "What is it?"

"I don't know this world," the imp stated plainly.
"What do you mean you don't know it?" Snow snapped.

"I mean there are many realms and I am unfamiliar with this particular one, dearie."

"You are the Dark One!"

"What exactly is your point?"

Bell held out her cell phone and snapped a picture of the land mass. She looked at Rumple then back to Snow and explained, "He may not know it offhand, but the Dark One has been around for millennia. I'll check the archive records okay? IF there is a record of it, I'll find it." The young brunette seemed to calm both sides who had increasingly agitated one another and then left the room.

"So that's it?" Henry asked in a small voice. He wasn't exactly expecting that they would find his moms that day, but he was expecting more than a seemingly dead end. His disappointment showed clearly on his face, and Ruby wrapped her arms around him to comfort him.

"Kid, the fact that the globe worked means your moms are alive somewhere, okay? This may not be the news you wanted, but it is confirmation that they are out there and knowing your moms, they won't ever stop trying to find a way back to you kid." she kissed the top of his head and looked into Snow White's teary eyes. The speech was just as much for her friend as it was to comfort the boy.

*Emma is alive. Somewhere, but alive.*

*This was indeed good news.*

With the help of the half horse half humans, Gabrielle found Emma and Regina a few hours before dawn. Regina had a full-on fever and Emma was anxious and worried for her queen. They were able to get the women back to camp on the back of one of the centaur scouts and got Regina the medical attention she desperately needed. Emma stayed with the woman through the day and night and finally Regina had regained some of her senses and awoke late the following afternoon. She was pleasantly surprised she didn't wake up dead from illness and that her wounds were skillfully treated.

Emma doted on her tirelessly, making sure the woman was comfortable and fed and adequately hydrated. The Queen noticed the change in their dynamic immediately. The blonde was very open with her. She could suddenly feel how deeply the girl cared for her. She never before felt that level of compassion, and she fully suspected the blonde loved her. *Not even with Daniel.* She noted sadly.

*Love is weakness,* the voice of her mother rang out in her mind.

She considered her options, as limited as they were and wondered if the blonde's feelings could be exploited. Despite not being in her own kingdom, in her own world, or even stripped of her magic, she felt safe with this blonde girl. She thought perhaps the blonde's concern for her would be the woman's own undoing.

Once she was strong enough, she and Emma moved back to their hut for the remainder of her recovery. Emma carried the brunette, despite the Queen's feeling on the matter. The Savior was stronger and lifted the woman bridal style and carried her to their temporary home.

"Set me down gently!" the Queen huffed, and Emma chuckled as she deposited her upon her bed as
gently as she could muster.

"There Your Majesty, better?" She asked with mirth.

"Yes, you've managed not to make my injuries worse," the Queen praised which made Emma chuckle.

"What is so funny?" she demanded.

"You're just so cute when you're a brat."

The woman folded her arms across her chest and huffed, "I am a queen, not a brat!"

"Of course, my mistake my Queen," Emma's green eyes danced playfully over the brunette's petulant stance.

Emma got up and got some water for her and Regina drawled with a smirk, "Do you have anything stronger?"

"Oh, I don't think that is a good idea at all..." Emma replied, fearful of the woman running off again; and other things. Mostly other things.

"I promised to stay put did I not?" Regina asked playfully reading the woman's body language.

"You did..."

"So you don't trust me, is that it?"

"No. Not even a little bit," Emma said with an easy smile.

"What? Why?!"

"Uh because trust is earned, Regina, and when I gave you trust freely, you escaped the first chance you got!" Emma's words became serious, and Regina knew she wouldn't win this battle.

"Alright well, I would like some wine to dull the ache in my feet. I have no intention of running anywhere in these." She lifted her leg and wiggled her toes at the blonde to prove her point.

"Alright, I'll see what I can do," Emma relented, knowing full well Regina knew the quickest way to get what she wanted was to play Emma's sympathy. It worked. It worked well.

An hour later they were a quarter of a bottle into the wine that was requested, and Emma, despite refusing the initial offer, gave into the brunette's badgering and had a cup herself.

She wasn't drunk, but it did take the edge off her high-strung emotions. The Queen, on the other hand, was on her third cup and looking like she was feeling no pain. The brunette reached out for the bottle, and Emma snatched it up before the older woman had a firm grip on it. "Awe come on Emma!" Regina whined. "I'm injured!" Emma chuckled and re-corked the bottle. "You should have paced yourself, Your Majesty."

Regina rolled her eyes and slammed back the rest of what was in her cup and set it on the table next to her. She sat and glared at the blonde through slitted eyes for some time.

"Stare at me all you want. You can have more later. You're hard enough to handle sober, I don't need to add drunken queen handler to my resume," the blonde chuckled at the inside joke and took a long pull on her drink.
"May I ask you something personal Emma?"

The blonde shifted in discomfort before agreeing.

"How long have you been in love with me?" Regina smiled victoriously as all the color drained from the blonde's face.

"I... I don't..."

"Oh come now, don't try and deny it! It is written all over your face dear," her Cheshire cat smile widened.

"I wasn't going to deny it," she admitted feeling confident that her Regina wouldn't remember this conversation. *If they ever got to her Regina.*

The admission surprised the Queen, and she let out a musical cackle, "Oh then I apologize, please dear, *do continue."

Emma cleared her throat and took another swig of her wine, "I was going to say, I don't know. It's been some time."

"Am I aware of your affections dear?"

"I don't think so, no."

"Why haven't you told me?"

"I... I can't."

"Why not?"

"It's complicated."

"Do I not care for you?"

"Yeah, I mean we are friends, so yeah."

"But you desire me, don't you Emma?" The Queen's dark eyes looked over the blonde and Emma could feel the weight of them on her.

"It is more than just that," Emma rolled her eyes.

"Oh do tell!" she smirked at the blonde's instant discomfort. Just because she enjoyed the girl's company didn't mean she didn't enjoy her games more.

Emma uncorked the bottle and poured herself another cup. The Queen instantly complained, "Hey! That's not fair!"

"By my count, you are three ahead of me Your Majesty!" Regina held out her cup ignoring the blonde's statement completely. Emma chuckled at the woman's insistence and poured her another cup. "Sip it, because that's it. Got it?"

"Yes, mother!" the brunette playfully shot back. She instantly regretted the term she used when she saw the fire in the blonde's eyes. She knew Emma's feelings toward Cora, and she hadn't meant it to harm the woman, in fact, she had grown to appreciate the blonde in the short time she had known her. "Emma, I didn't mean..."
"I know," Emma shot a quick smile that barely covered her true emotions. They each sat in uncomfortable silence for several long moments before the brunette decided to bring them back to the topic at hand. She had questions that burned inside of her that only this blonde woman could answer. "So you were about to tell me how-complicatedly in love you are with me dear," the brunette goaded and took a sip of her drink.

"I don't recall agreeing to that," Emma deflected feigning ignorance.

"I thought I was the one with the memory loss dear," the Queen sassed.

"Oh Her Majesty's got jokes now?" Emma chuckled and noted the happy little buzz she had and set down her cup.

"Anyone who has spent any amount of time with me will agree I am very humorous dear."

"You've got what we call a dry wit," Emma agreed with the Queen's assessment. "With a touch of bitchy," she added with a nod.

Brown eyes darted in the blonde's direction, and Emma held up her hands in surrender, "Some people like that!"

The Queen narrowed her gaze, "Some people, like you perhaps?"

"I find it endearing, yes," Emma felt comfortable admitting.

"Would you like to hear a secret Emma?" the Queen's voice dropped several octaves, and Emma gulped nervously, but nodded her head yes.

"I find you extremely attractive, even without my memories."

Emma rolled her eyes, "Right, perhaps when you are trying to escape." Emma scoffed, "Don't think I missed you trying to bash my head in with that rock in the forest your majesty!"

The Queen defended herself, "I thought you were going to kill me!"

"You have shitty aim," the blonde chuckled. "And you throw like a girl," she added and busted out in laughter.

Regina stood from the comfortable leather chair and waltzed over to her companion. She bent down and took the blonde's cup from the table and downed the contents then placed her hands on the armrests on either side of the woman and drawled, "I am a woman, not a girl. Let me show you the difference," she crawled as she leaned into a sudden passionate kiss.

The move took the Sheriff by surprise, and her lips and tongue kissed Regina back feverishly. When her brain finally chimed in Emma pushed the brunette back gently and broke their embrace. Her entire body was humming as if she were electrified.

"That's it, you're cut off," Emma managed to get out with forced mirth.

"Oh dear, we could have so much fun," Regina cooed.

Emma's throat tightened as she swallowed hard.

"You do desire me... I can tell..." Regina traced a finger down the neck of the Savior between the woman's breasts.
Emma grabbed the woman's hand and kissed the back of it lovingly. "You are everything to me. I love every aspect of you Regina Mills, but I can't, I won't… take advantage of you this way."

Emma looked intently at the woman standing far too close to her; she could see the woman's heartbeat racing at the pulse point of her neck.

The brunette leaned in and whispered into the Savior's ear, "If I am basically throwing myself at you, would it really be taking advantage of me?" Regina pulled back with a wide smile, her eyes black with desire.

"Yes," Emma tucked one of Regina's stray strands of hair back behind her ear.

The Queen pouted, "You are decidedly no fun Em-ma." Brown eyes hovered close and studied the blonde with intensity.

"Perhaps, but I do believe it is bedtime for queens."

"That is precisely what I'm talking about!" Regina exclaimed and leaned in to capture the blonde's lips once more. Emma was prepared this time and stopped her advance and pushed her to a standing position.

"I'm pleased you are feeling better Your Majesty, but we've got a big day tomorrow, you'll need your rest."

The Queen pouted and shuffled over to the bed and crawled up on top of the covers seductively, looking back at the blonde with a wide grin. Emma noticed and chuckled, shaking her head she gathered up their empty cups and put them in the basin she used for dishes.

Regina rolled her eyes hard realizing the blonde wasn't going to fold for some quick fun and got under the covers. She watched as Emma put out the candles around their room and got into her cot.

"Last chance Em-ma…" the Queen called over to her. "This bed may be barely passable to be called a bed, but I guarantee it is more comfortable than that plank on stilts you're sleeping on."

"Good night Regina," the Savior replied with a wide smile.

Emma liked the Evil Queen when she wasn't all executey and evil.

*Or escapey and accusey.*

She was funny, and smart and sexy, but playful and a little broken, a little selfish and a little defensive, but Emma knew all that. She knew that, and she knew why. She had been so worried about this part of her friend, the stories her mother told her were terrifying, but she was still Regina. The fire and the passion and the snark. She was way more entitled, and perhaps if she had her magic Emma would be singing a different tune, but she honestly liked her. Aside from the escape and the fever, the last few days had been, well, not terrible.

*Trying perhaps, but not terrible.*

She did miss her Regina though. The Evil Queen lacked the composure of her Regina. She was a doer. She was used to instant gratification and getting her own way and didn't think about the consequences. She was selfish, for sure, but she wasn't the insane woman Snow White had portrayed her to be. She seemed lonely, honestly, and was extremely responsive to compassion and perhaps even the love Emma had shown the woman. If for nothing else, Emma was grateful she had gotten to see this side of her friend. Obviously not the circumstances that brought them both to this point, but Emma felt like the woman was way more misunderstood than she ever knew
possible.

The blonde laid on her cot and worried about the following day's events. How the woman would take the news of getting another dose of medicine. She knew she would try and convince Regina to do what needed to be done, but that fear the woman has, well, it's a doozy, and she made a mental note to ask Gabrielle if they had a sedative. She held sincere doubt this version of her friend would go into it as quietly as she's done before.

She heard her Queen's breathing slow and deepen in the darkness of the room, and much to Emma's surprised delight her tiny queen started to snore.

_I do not snore Miss Swan!_ Emma chuckled to herself as she imagined what her Regina would say at the accusation and then settled down to sleep.

Xena tracked the unorganized group of 'bandits' for days, keeping far enough away from them that they had no idea they were even being followed. The dimwits led her straight back to their encampment. Xena hunkered down at the top of the hill that overlooked the valley and took stock of what she now realized was a legion of warriors. She pulled out a seeing glass and tried to make out the banner.

"No..." the warrior princess whispered in disbelief.

"That's impossible!" She put aside the shock of what the banner revealed and then went down to take a closer look. She quickly subdued a lax guard and took up the all too familiar silver mask. This mask haunted her, even though the man behind it was long dead. She ran her fingers over the cold metal; this mask was the start of it all. The rise and fall of the destroyer of nations. The rise of Callisto. Of Altì. Every destructive mistake she had ever made was because of this mask. Every selfish decision.

_Vengeance was mine._

Oh yes, there were others who twisted her drive, but this mask… this mask gave birth to the most fearsome warlord to ever walk the planet.

"Cortese," she hissed low and dangerous before dropping the source of her nightmares and heading out to find out who had taken his place.

Regina awoke with a loud thrumming that pained her terribly. She opened her eyes with a grumpy accusation and looked over to where she had last seen Emma, the woman's cot. The little makeshift bed was empty and she looked around the rest of the empty room. There was a cup of water on the nightstand, she took it and downed the contents. As she was getting up from the bed, the blonde entered the hut and slammed the wooden door a little too hard, and Regina winced in pain.

"Oh, Your Majesty! I was just coming to wake you!" Emma said only slightly louder than necessary.

"Must you be so loud?" Regina grumbled.

"I'm afraid I must, Your Grace. You have only yourself to blame you know!" Emma snickered as the brunette scowled.

"I believe I shall blame you, my dear, as you were the one pouring the vile liquid down my throat!"
Emma broke out into a roaring laugh, and the Queen cringed in pain. "I feel as though I may actually vomit," the brunette mumbled as she turned a light shade of green.

"Yeah, the booze here is way strong! Come on, get dressed. We'll go get breakfast this morning down in the mess hall." Emma clapped her hands loudly to hurry Regina along.

Regina winced in pain once more and declined the offer, "I do believe I shall skip that rather unappetizing offer."

"This is not an offer you can refuse, my Queen. Get dressed!" Emma pinned her with a look that sapped the argument from the brunette, begrudgingly.

It was warmer that day than it had been and Emma laid out Regina's amazon outfit in hopes the woman would wear it. Of course, the Evil Queen being who she was, couldn't just put the outfit on and join her for breakfast. No. There had to be a show.

"You expect me to dress in… in… this?! Have you gone mad?" The look of shock and disgust covered Regina's face.

"It is yours, Your Majesty. It is a little warm out, and everyone else is wearing them, and Jesus Regina will you just put the damn thing on before I stand here and starve to death?!"

The brunette snapped her head back as if the blonde had physically struck her and looked at Emma silently for a moment weighing exactly what she wanted to say to that. Emma didn't give her an option to argue further and turned and left the brunette alone to change.

A few minutes later she heard a whine and then, "Emmmaaaa?" Emma smiled and went to see what her friend needed.

Regina stood in the red crushed velvet halter top and leather skirt but was having difficulty figuring out how to put on the leather top. "I require your assistance!" the Queen snapped. Emma muffled her victorious grin and helped the woman. Once done up, Emma sat her down and ran the comb through her hair and helped the woman into her boots. The blonde knelt down and carefully slid each of Regina's bare feet into the soft leather of the shoes she was to wear and then carefully laced them up. The Queen watched with appreciation as the blonde took careful pains to make sure she didn't aggravate the healing cuts on her feet.

"This footwear is exquisite!" the Queen commented as they walked down to the mess tent. "I know, they are like the most comfortable shoes I've ever owned." Emma agreed with a smile and Regina hooked her arm around Emma's and allowed herself to be led through the village.

"You asked the other day if I might like to assess their warriors, is that offer still open?" Regina asked casually.

"Oh, the other day when you tried to escape?" Emma smirked as Regina scoffed. "I asked if you wanted to watch them, not assess them."

"Whatever," Regina waved her companion off.

"If you'd like to do that today, I think we can manage it," Emma replied with a large smile. She was not a fool; the Queen sounded far too casual about the request for it to just be about watching the Amazons. She hoped that perhaps she was just getting cabin fever and wanted to get some fresh air, but that little voice in the back of her head was telling her to keep her guard up about the request.
They entered the food tent, and Emma was pleasantly surprised to find it relatively empty. There were several tables lined up cafeteria style, and those tables had a few scattered amazons. It was midmorning, and Emma realized that they probably missed the main breakfast crowd with their tardiness. She went back towards the woman she had seen Eponin approach for all of Regina and Emma's meals and before she said anything the woman brought out two dishes prepared. Emma thanked the woman and went to hand Regina her dish only to see the brunette had already turned and was walking back towards the tables.

"Yeah that's cool, I've got it," she mumbled and rolled her eyes. She carried their food back to the table Regina chose and sat the woman's plate down in front of her before taking her own seat.

"Tell me about my son," the Queen asked as she put the blue tinted eggs into her mouth.

"Our son is amazing," Emma said with a huge smile as she thought of Henry. "He is so smart! And quick! He picks up everything I swear. He reminds me of you so often. He has your wit."

"And what does the boy have of you dear?"

"My good looks of course."

She wanted to tell the woman how well she raised him but didn't want to explain why she raised him. "Gabrielle thinks it might be harmful to tell you too much about what you think of as your future," she said, and the Queen raised an eyebrow in question.

"Alright dear. Will you tell me one thing?" the brunette said dropping her eyes from Emma's gaze.

"Maybe," Emma answered noncommittally. "Depends on what it is."

"Have I killed that wretched girl yet?" the brunette flicked her long dark eyelashes up, and brown eyes pinned the blonde in place.

"I'm assuming you mean Snow White," Emma asked stalling.

"Of course," Regina drawled knowingly.

"Killed her? No."

"Have I enacted my revenge at least?"

"You have destroyed her happiness, your Majesty. You destroyed her happy family." She swallowed thickly. "Killing her would have ended her suffering," Emma added knowing that would satisfy the woman's bloodlust and put an end to the questions.

A full, satisfied smile drew across her friend's face. "Marvelous darling. Simply marvelous." The Queen took a heaping bite of her breakfast and beamed her pleasure. Emma rolled her eyes to herself over the Evil Queen's smug look.

She reminded herself that the woman didn't have Henry. Her revenge was all she cared about back then. She tried not to take the smugness personally, it wasn't like the woman knew ruining Snow's happy family effectively subjected Emma to grow up as she had. She didn't know Emma was Snow's daughter and if she did, things would get ugly.
Emma was taken out of her private thoughts as a commotion was heard, and several of the Amazon warriors who were eating a few tables over got up and rushed outside. Emma got a feeling low in her gut and stood, beckoning the Queen to follow her.

They chased after the Amazons to a large tented hut in the center of the village. Regina clasped Emma's hand and followed her into the poorly lit tent. There were about 40 leather-clad warriors all standing and murmuring amongst themselves. Emma led Regina around the outside of the group and made her way to a better viewpoint where she got a glimpse of the warrior princess looking suitably stoic standing next to Gabrielle who was in hush discussions with her first in command. Ephiny nodded with a salute and rushed off taking several warriors with her. Gabrielle gave direction to the remaining warriors and once the room cleared Emma approached the couple who took the chance at a proper hello.

"Hi," Emma said nervously, as she circled the embracing couple. Xena looked down at Emma and Regina's hands and then back up to Emma and smirked. Emma blushed but didn't drop the Queen's hand. Instead, she got down to business, "Is everything alright? Where have you been? We've been worried!"

Xena smiled and held Gabrielle close and nodded, "We were having some issues on our border, and the person who raided the villages wanted to start a war between the Centaurs and us."

"The Centaurs are our friends," Emma said confused. "They helped us..."

"That isn't common knowledge," Gabrielle added. "The Centaurs and the Amazons had a long-standing grudge, but we've put that behind us. I didn't think it necessary to post a list of our allies to the entire world."

"That is clever," Regina said with unhindered astonishment. "Your enemies have to guess at how strong you really are." The Sheriff side glanced Regina, knowing precisely what the pompous Evil Queen thought of the Amazons at that moment, and she shook her head before returning her focus back to their friends.

Xena nodded thoughtfully towards Regina. "How are you feeling today? Are we back to ourselves just yet?" Blue eyes looked to Emma with the question.

"No," Emma said before the brunette could comment. "I was hoping to administer another dose this evening."

Surprise on the Queen's face was unmasked, "What?"

"I was going to tell you, but I wanted to talk to Gabrielle beforehand to make sure we could," Emma replied quietly, but contrite.

Xena looked confused. "Why wouldn't we be able to give her another dose?"

"Can we not talk about me as if I am not in the room?" Regina huffed visibly irritated. She dropped the Savior's hand and folded her arms over her chest.

"Regina had a fever a couple of days ago because someone ran off in the woods barefoot and wet so I wanted to be sure we could still do it," Emma explained.

Gabrielle nodded, "Have Maggie take a once over to make sure, but I think we can start the IV after dinner time." She smiled at Emma proud of herself for using the blonde foreigner's vernacular then looked at Regina, "You won't be able to eat beforehand so make sure you get a proper lunch please."
Emma saw the Queen register what Gabrielle had said when her eyes got large as saucers. She looked back towards Emma as if to confirm what she heard and Emma was looking terribly guilty knowing full well Regina would have a problem with how they needed to administer the dose.

"I believe I am well enough, I don't need any more of your medicine," Regina announced.

"Okay, we can talk about it alright? Let's take a visit to Maggie and get you looked at," Emma placated.

"How do I know you aren't poisoning me?" The brunette snapped viciously. She was frightened, and anger was the only real emotion she was comfortable with.

"Why would I poison you a little bit at a time when I could have spiked the wine last night? I'm sure you would have gladly drunk the entire bottle yourself had I allowed it," Emma said with a smug look. The Savior softened her features and stepped closer to the Queen, "Trust me. I won't let anything happen to you okay?" Regina fidgeted with one of the long leather strands on her skirt but didn't reply. Emma looked up at Xena and asked if there was anything she could do in regards to the raids.

Emma patted her sword, "I'm getting better with this thing, I can help. Do we know who it is?"

"There is a medium-sized army gathered three days from here. I was able to get into their camp and found out they are flying the banner of a nemesis of mine. The man who put me on the path to become the warlord I became."

"Cortese?" Emma interrupted with surprise. "Isn't he dead?"

The shock in Xena's face was evident, and the tall brunette looked to her young bard for help. Emma shrugged her shoulders and played it off, "It was one of my favorite episodes… er… stories… It really showed how much you changed because you didn't kill him, you know?" She worried her brow and looked between Xena and Gabrielle for confirmation, "You didn't kill him right? His second in command did? Tell me he is at least dead!"

"He is dead," Xena frowned, uncertain how she felt about how much detail these stories had of her life, and she made a mental note to discuss her fears with her bard.

"Oh good," Emma exclaimed visibly relieved. "Wait, but this other warlord is flying his banner?"

"Cortese was a very dangerous, ruthless and powerful man. Not many know of his demise. Three very weak warlords got together under his banner and have taken his legend to strengthen their army as one," Xena explained.

"Oh," Emma nodded and thought about what they could do about it.

"That is strategically astute." Regina piped up. "Especially if news of his death isn't common knowledge." The Queen was still visibly angry but was feeling left out of their conversation. She was used to being the center of attention and felt unease when she wasn't.

Emma side glanced the haughty queen and then asked, "Okay, what are we going to do about this?"

"We are going to take a group of our best warriors along with the centaur's finest and go eradicate the scourge. They don't know we are allies, so they are sitting assuming we are blaming each other for the raids." Xena's blue eyes looked into Emma's green, "You are going to get your Queen checked out and prepare for tonight. We won't be ready to leave until tomorrow so I'll come by
with the antidote a little later."

"That won't be necessary," Regina informed her, standing firm in her decision, "I won't be needing your medicine."

Emma waved Xena over away from Regina and Gabrielle and whispered, "She is terrified of needles. I don't think she is going to let us do this. Do you have a sedative or something we can give her to calm her down?"

Xena looked back at the queen's making light small-talk then focused her attention back to Emma. "I'd rather not mix anything with the antidote. I can put the pinch on her..."

Emma deadpanned, "However awesome it would be to see that in action, no, forced immobilization won't help calm her down."

"Then your only option is to convince her."

"Augh easier said than done, Princess," Emma huffed, and Xena chuckled.

"Oh, I bet." Xena put her hand on Emma's shoulder, "How are you holding up?"

"I'm okay. I let her escape but found her, and she's alright I guess. The Evil Queen isn't as bad as I thought she would be."

"This is our last dose. I can make more, but how many more do you think she'll need?"

"I don't know honestly. Can you make as much as you can and we'll re-assess once it is gone? How much more can we safely give her? I mean I guess we are going to have to hit a point where I'm just grateful she is awake and has some memories, but I'd prefer she remember our son before we go home at least."

"Well let's hope for the best," Xena said and squeezed Emma's shoulder.

"Hey, thanks for everything. I'm glad you're okay, I was really worried about you."

Xena chuckled, "Yeah, I'm sure! Your little queen over there didn't keep you too busy hmm?"

"I'm a multitask worrier," Emma replied with a shy smile.

"Alright, get her Highness checked out will ya? I'm going to tend to my own Queen if you don't mind." Xena winked at Emma, which made the blonde blush at the implications. "Right. Regina?" she called over to the two shorter women. "Come on, let's go see Maggie hmm?"

The Queen protested the antidote all the way to the healer's hut much to Emma's displeasure. Once inside, Maggie went over Regina's vitals and looked over her stitches and gave her a clean bill of health. Emma took Regina's hand and led her down to the practice yard, and they sat down and watched the warrior's run their drills. There were far less of them Emma noticed then there were the other days, and she assumed the bulk of the women were preparing to ship out in the morning.

Emma saw a familiar face walking across the yard carrying an armful of practice weapons. She got up and told Regina she would be right back and jogged over towards Eponin.

"Hey!" She called as she caught up to the Amazon, "Are you going with the group against the uh... Army or whatever that is threatening us tomorrow?"

"Yes, my Queen has me in high command, Emma," Eponin stated proudly.
"That's great!" Emma tried to sound supportive because Eponin sounded pleased, but she really was worried about the battle. "Just, be careful huh? I wouldn't want to lose my favorite Amazon guard," Emma smiled as Eponin put her hand on her shoulder.

Regina sat under the maple tree and watched the athletic blonde trot over towards a short, stocky brunette. She certainly has a type. Regina muttered to herself. She watched as the shorter woman blatantly flirted with Emma. Touching her… and the blonde allowed for it! The longer she watched, the angrier she got. She thought about how Emma felt against her, how loving she was with her, but when Regina kissed her, she pushed her aside. Now she let this hussy touch her.

The emotions she felt for the blonde confused her. She was angry that she may have been played by the blonde, that what she was starting to believe about the woman's feelings were all untrue. Well, she can have her little stocky warrior! I don't need her! I have my revenge! I have enough of my memories! I don't need her ridiculously vicious medicine!

The Queen stood and stormed off towards their hut completely forgetting her careful, yet convoluted, escape plan. Jealous rage filled her, and all she could think about was Emma.

"Thank you for your concern. We will be back before you can miss me." Eponin tilted her head towards where Regina was sitting, "You lost your queen again Your Highness," she said with a chuckle as Emma whipped around to see Regina stalking off towards their hut. Emma rolled her eyes and looked back at Eponin, "Be safe and thank you for everything huh?"

"See you soon my friend!" the brunette Amazon called after the blonde who was jogging towards Regina.
Chapter 24

Emma opened the door to their hut and only hesitated briefly when she heard a loud crash come from within. She rushed into the back room to see Regina pitching a fit. The pitcher of water they were using came narrowly close to Emma's head and hit the wall behind her. "Woah! What the hell Regina?!!"

She approached the woman slowly with her hands up and eyes wide. She ducked as a cup flew at her head, and sidestepped a stool that was hurled her way. "What the hell is going on?" Emma demanded.

"Why don't you go share your little warrior's hut because you are not wanted here!" Regina raged and threw a book that thudded into Emma's thigh.

"Ow," the blonde silently cursed and bent down to pick up the book at her feet. She approached the brunette who turned away from her and placed the book back on the table. "Eponin is our friend Regina. She is a part of the group of warriors who are going off to fight Cortese's army. I was just wishing her luck." Emma's voice was soothing and calm, and she was in the middle of praising herself for keeping her composure in the face of the Queen's temper tantrum when the brunette whipped around to face her. Her cheeks were damp with angry tears, and Emma was shocked for a moment before she slipped back into protect-Regina-mode.

"Hey, It's okay R'Gina, come on…" She threw a smile at the Queen.

"You desire her!" Regina exclaimed jealousy thick in her voice. It wasn't a question it was an explicit accusation, and the hurt in the Queen's eyes pained the Savior.

"Why would I want some lowly warrior when I could easily have a Queen?" Emma smirked appealing to the Evil Queen's sense of entitlement.

"I wouldn't say it would be easy, peasant!" Regina folded her arms and turned her back to the blonde once more.

"I'm pretty sure you were throwing yourself at me last night," Emma said smugly and pushed aside thoughts she had of scooping up her friend in her arms to prove to her where her heart belonged.

"I was bored!" The Queen defended then added with a huff, "And drunk!"

"Of course Your Majesty!" Emma smiled wildly trying so very hard not to laugh at how ridiculous her friend was acting at the moment. "You are everything but easy my Queen." Emma sighed and placed a tentative hand on the shorter woman's shoulder. Regina quickly shrugged her off, which made Emma smile wider. "You're worth the fight though," Emma admitted quietly.

The admission made the Queen turn and side glance the Savior. "Of course I am." She huffed indignantly, "You best remember that!"

"Always my Queen," she tried once more to comfort the brunette who was still angry. Regina pushed her away and sneered, "I am not allowing you to torture me!" Her anger filled jealousy was fueled by her fear over what the woman had in store for her that evening.

Emma gaped with surprise. "I would never torture you, My Majesty."

"It's Your Majesty, you uneducated buffoon!"
"That's what I said. My Majesty," Emma smiled poking fun at the queen a little trying to lighten the tension in the room.

Regina rolled her eyes, "Idiot."

"Your idiot," Emma corrected with a smile.

"I'm not doing it Emma, and that's final," Regina huffed determined to stay the angry course.

"I promise you, I promise you, it will be over before you realize it," Emma pleaded.

Regina shook her head in defiance and walked passed the blonde to the table. She opened the book she haphazardly threw at the infuriating blonde and was surprised to see it was her own writing. She looked back toward the blonde and asked, "This is mine?"

Emma hummed her agreement and sat down at the table next to the Queen. Green eyes observed her as she skimmed over her own words. "Have you read this Emma?"

"No," Emma replied simply. "That was given to you to help you. You can write in it if you want…" Emma trailed off when she noticed her Queen grow rigid.

"How much of my time as Queen are you aware?"

Emma lowered her eyes which were filled with the rage she felt. "Not much," she muttered.

Regina recognized the anger in those green eyes and knew Emma knew much more than she admitted to. "So you know," Regina stated the question as if it were just simple fact.

"I suspected," Emma confirmed.

"I killed him. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"I didn't do it myself. I had him murdered."

"I know," Emma confirmed quietly. She remembered the story her mother told her of the genie who was freed by the king and fell in love with Regina's beauty. *Shallow bastard. There's so much more to her than her looks.* By then, Regina was twisted, her heart darkened, and she manipulated the fool into doing her bidding.

After a long, tense silence Emma added quietly, "I would have killed him too."

"His brat… it is all her fault…" Regina whispered.

"I blame your mother," Emma stated.

*Not mine,* she added silently in her head.

"Oh don't get me wrong, I hate her just as much," the Queen's eyes met the fiery green of Emma's own briefly before she continued, "Snow convinced her father I would make a great mother to her, even though I was barely a few years older than she. He would do anything the child wanted, and so he took me, with my mother's insistence." Regina nervously twisted her fingers around the loose strands of her skirt. "That girl caught me with my beloved. We were going to run away together! He knew what Cora was and the things she did and wanted to free me from her clutches! I ran after the little brat, and she promised me she wouldn't tell but she ran straight to my mother and told her,
and my mother killed him.

She killed him right in front of me. She ripped his heart out, and I tried to kiss him, believing that true love's kiss would wake him, but it didn't. The next day my mother trapped me there at the castle, casting a very powerful spell that would never allow me to leave without the presence of the King." Regina took a chance to gauge Emma's reaction to her tale. Satisfied Emma was disgusted by what she had heard so far the Queen decided to tell the girl things she hadn't repeated to anyone, not ever.

"Then there was the King himself," she said quietly, and Emma knew she couldn't stop this story from being told, no matter how much she didn't want to know the truth she suspected. "He was already in his 60's when we wed. I was nothing but a pretty distraction for his brat and a vessel to carry his seed, and when said seed didn't take root he began to harm me, physically in ways that no one would notice. Not that anyone would have helped me."

The Queen huffed and rolled her eyes, "I was his property. He was King. He blamed me that his aging seed did not produce an heir." She shook her head and stared into the darkness of the roughly cut table before her. "He would degrade me, he would say awful, hurtful things to me."

Tears threatened to spill as the memories of her previous life flashed before her, playing out in the ridges of the dark table. "When I wasn't to be put on display, or needed to entertain his brat, he locked me in my room. Hours on end, sometimes days. It was barely more than a jail cell." She shook her head as if she decided against telling Emma more about her lonely time spent locked in her room, but the Sheriff knew exactly the sorts of thoughts her Queen must have had during that lonely time.

"I had no privacy of my own, he read my diary and used what he found in there against me, to harm me further..." the Queen's voice trailed off and as if she made an internal decision to reveal the next part of her story she nodded to herself and leaned on the table for support. "He would come to me drunk and when he couldn't... perform... he would rape me or beat me with whatever was handy most times both."

Emma was frozen still in her seat, not wanting to hear the horrors her love endured at the hands of her grandfather, but still unable to make it stop.

Regina continued as if the dam had broken and she could not stop. "He would force me to... entertain... special guests. Men from other lands and he would watch what they did to me and after he would beat me - sometimes because he didn't think I was adequate in pleasing his guests, sometimes because he was jealous, insisting that I enjoyed it. It was hell. All because his precious little brat wanted a new mommy," she spat through fresh angry tears.

Emma raged deep within, but as her heart broke, she wept for the Queen.

"I am not telling you this to elicit sympathy!" Regina spat at the blonde through gritted teeth.

Emma slammed her palms down on the table and stood up knocking her chair over, "I don't pity you!" Emma raged back through her tears. "I lo-love you, and it hurts me that, that happened to you!"

"I killed him. I banished mother, and I will get my revenge on Snow White!" Regina roared back at the blonde not registering in her anguish what the blonde said.

"I know..." Emma said quietly and felt a little bad about agreeing to that - but it wasn't a lie. She did get revenge. Eventually. Little did the Queen before her know, it was at the expense of the
blonde's own childhood. Emma circled the table and tried to embrace the older woman. "I don't need you, Emma!" The Queen shouted and shrugged off the blonde's advances.

"Well, maybe I need you!" Emma countered just as loud and wrapped her arms around the small frame of her friend. After a moment she felt hands of her Queen slide around her back. She relaxed and cupped the back of the brunette's head and held her to her chest. "You get everything you want my Queen. Everything you want and everything you need."

"I'm so tired Emma," she heard a small voice admit.

"I'm here my Queen, I'm here, and I will never let anyone hurt you."
Chapter 25

Xena made final plans with the upper epsilon warriors in the Amazon and Centaur armies. They were not leaving either village completely unprotected, but surmised that the Cortese army is still sitting unawares that the hooves and harlots, as they so charmingly dubbed each group, are in fact teaming up against them. So they were taking the bulk of their skilled, trained warriors for the assault.

Gabrielle and Ephiny were leading the women, Xena and Phantes, son of the Centaur leader Tildus, would lead the Centaur attack from the northwest. The warrior princess went over the final details with the first band of scouts which will be used as bait against Cortese's own scouts to lure them into thinking the Amazons are attacking the Centaurs while the remainder of the Amazon army circled around to approach from the southwestern side of Cortese's camp. The plan they had was foolproof, Xena knew, but she double and triple checked the details just to be certain.

Once she was satisfied with everything, she joined Gabrielle in one of the larger war strategy tents. The Queen was going over possible scenarios, routes they were unable to cover and any ambushes they may encounter. Blue eyes watched the blonde as the young woman studied the map laid out on the large table in the center of the room. Green eyes were scanning, searching, mapping, planning.

That's my girl. Xena thought to herself.

The little Queen was adamant about starting a new life in another realm. The warrior wanted that. She wanted everything her bard wanted, and she knew the blonde was right in her thinking. A new world away from Xena's past would be a fresh start. She has undoubtedly paid what was owed karmically. In Emma's realm, she would continue to give back, to fight for good, the only difference would be the warrior's bloody past wouldn't kill or maim more innocents while she atoned for her sins. Yes, a new life is exactly what she and her bard needed.

She would miss this. Planning for war. The symmetry of it. You can only plan so much, and then you just have to let go and trust in the decisions you've made, the plans you've enacted to play out the way you intended them to. Guessing what the other side will do is a huge part of that. The fact that Xena had intimate knowledge of one of the three warlords they were going up against played into their favor, but there were two relatively unknown factors yet, and she really didn't like leaving things to chance.

As the warrior was deep in worried thought, she felt an all too familiar chill and jerked her attention to where the feeling was coming from. In a low growl, she sneered, "Ares…"

"How exactly do you do that Xena?" the muscle-clad god shimmered his appearance before her. "No other human can sense me the way you do." He dragged his finger down the side of her stoic face.

She shook him off and sneered, "What do you want?"

He said seductively with a dimpled smile, "Oh me? Nothing! I could feel your juices starting to flow as you prepared for battle and it got me all… tingly!" Xena rolled her eyes.

"Don't you miss this Xena? The excitement of the night before war!" He sucked his teeth and shook his head lightly at the warrior, "Nothing quite like it is there princess?"
"I'm not coming back to you, we've gone over this," she stated almost bored with his theatrics.

"Oh, I haven't quite given up on you yet my princess." He walked behind her and settled his hands on her hips, pulling her against him; he whispered into her ear, "Nor has your little brat's skills escaped my notice. She is getting rather good at war prep isn't she?" Xena whipped around and held out her chakram against his throat in one smooth solid move. "You leave her out of this Ares," she hissed through a clenched jaw. He chuckled and stepped closer to her allowing the blade to dig into the pristine flesh of his neck. "Come now Xena," he pouted. "I can't let you have all the fun hmmmm?"

"I mean it, Ares. You stay away from her!" The warrior princess warned, her crystal blue eyes chilled and full. The god of war chuckled and disappeared before her in shimmering light. She looked around, and no one else in the tent seemed to notice the god of war's intrusion, nor their conversation, so Xena walked over to her bard and leaned in and kissed her on the neck.

"Hey, brat."

"My Queen," Xena wrapped her hands firmly around Gabrielle's waist and pulled her against herself with force.

"What's wrong?" Gabrielle struggled to keep her footing with the force Xena used to claim her.

"Nothing."

"Xena…" the bard warned in a low tone.

"Really, it isn't anything I can't handle."

Gabrielle's green eyes met the icy chips of her lover and knew her well enough to drop it. "Alright well, I'll make up another few batches of Regina's antidote tonight before we go to bed, will you go deal with giving her the next dose?"

Xena latched onto Gabrielle's pulse point and sucked the delicate skin into her mouth. The bard moaned and pushed back into the taller warrior who wrapped her arms around her bard, searching out the soft skin of her lover. "Do hurry back brat, I've missed you terribly," she said as she tilted her head giving Xena more access to her neck. The quick make-out session was cut short when Eponin entered with a salute. "That'll be my queue," Xena said with a chuckle and kissed her bard once more on the cheek and headed out of the hut.

Emma pulled out her sword and began sharpening it, even though she hadn't used it, she needed something to do while Regina wrote vigorously in her diary. The long smooth strokes of stone against blade soothed the Savior, and she understood exactly why Xena performed this ritual every night, need it or not. Even though let's face it, the warrior needed to keep her blade sharp and used it daily, unlike the Sheriff who barely had a ding out of the edge, and what damage was present she was certain had gotten there by way of its previous owner. The habit was melodic and soothing, and after her Queen's admissions that evening, Emma needed something to hold her together as she drowned out the images newly discovered information brought up.

She looked over at her friend, her dark hair curled back around her ears, her brow knit in a focused pinch as she laid out her elegant script on the parchment of her diary. Emma didn't wonder what the Queen was writing about. She knew it probably had everything to do with their previous heated discussion. Completely convincing the Queen to submit to more of the antidote had not been the result.
"You won't let anyone harm me? *You* intend on harming me, Emma!" Regina pulled back from their embrace.

"I know you don't like needles, but this needs to happen, Gina," Emma tried to soothe the woman with her words and attempted to reclaim their previous stance within one another's arms.

"No!" Regina pushed her away angrily. "Emma I did what you asked of me! I do not feel ill! I will not allow you to subject me to this!"

"You'll barely feel it I promise you! I really don't want to sedate you, not with you being sick just a few days ago. The antidote takes so much out of you! Please Your Majesty?"

The visibly shaken Queen before her asked, "Do you know why I dislike… needles?"

Emma shook her head and answered, "I probably don't want to know either."

Regina sneered at the blonde curling her lip up in disgust as she stalked toward the blonde as if she were prey and hissed, "It was a favorite torture of my mother's to correct certain undesirable behaviors. She would immobilize me with her magic. She swallowed thickly against the feeling of helplessness and continued, "A particular favorite was tree branches. From those branches she would repeatedly pierce my flesh for hours, sometimes days, depending on the offense she was trying to correct. Tiny pinpricks all over me, all at once or sometimes intervals whichever the mood struck her. I was completely helpless to stop her!"

Memories of the pricks digging into her caused her to shudder, and she shouted, "I will NOT allow this to happen!"

"Okay. I get it," Emma said quietly, her green eyes bright with fresh tears.

"You get *nothing!*" the Queen bellowed, "No one could *ever* understand what she did to me!" A lifetime of agony at the hands of people who loved her overwhelmed her, and she folded her arms over herself and turned from the blonde.

Emma shuddered at the implications of Regina's childhood and agreed, "You're right. Whenever my caregivers hurt me, I was removed from the home fairly quickly. I can't imagine how helpless you felt. How *hopeless*. The woman who was supposed to be the epitome of unconditional love doing that to you. How trapped you felt Regina, knowing no one was coming to help you. No one was going to make the pain stop."

The Queen turned and met the gaze of the Savior and Emma partially truthed, "The worst thing my birth mother did was leave me in the woods to freeze to death like a piece of garbage on the side of the road." That was what she believed growing up, and it wasn't the entire truth, but it was close. "But when the adults charged with my care did harm me, someone was watching out for me. I never felt trapped," Emma lowered her eyes unable to hold the queen's gaze. "Or alone," she added quietly.

The Queen lifted her chin smugly and asked, "You were harmed as a child?"

This was something Regina, *her* Regina, didn't know about the Savior's past; Emma swallowed thickly and admitted, "I was."

After a beat, Emma unlaced and removed the leather bodice she was wearing and lifted the back of the bright yellow halter top to reveal a large white V-shaped scar. "This was the worst of it and left a pretty big scar."
"That looks like a burn," The Queen commented, captivated as she allowed her fingers to trace over the warped flesh.

"It was," Emma said simply not giving away much in the way of explanation. "I knew the woman who did this didn't care for me, and I hadn't expected her to. Not the way I'm sure you thought Cora should have with you." The Savior pulled her shirt back down and turned to look at her friend. "She should have protected you."

"You understand why I can not allow you to subject me to this torture."

"I understand why you don't wish to go through this again."

"Again?"

"Yes, you've taken three doses already."

"Willingly?" The Queen looked shocked by this news.

"More or less," Emma said with a slight eye roll.

The Queen accused, "I sincerely doubt that!"

"Well, the first dose you were asleep and so that one shouldn't really count. The other two times you trusted me enough to be brave and go through with it." Emma stepped closer to her friend and put a hand gently on the brunette's bicep. "I was there with you every step of the way." She felt the Queen tremble under her touch and against her better judgment she stepped into the woman's personal space and wrapped her arms around her. Her green eyes closed and fresh tears poured down over her cheeks. "I won't force you, my Queen."

"I don't remember the time before the other doses," Regina mumbled into Emma's chest.

"No, the antidote sort of resets you I guess." 

"I don't want to be reset, Emma," the Savior felt arms unwrap and circle her waist when the Queen admitted, "I feel a connection with you, and from what you've told me, we don't have this."

Emma kissed the Queen's temple, "We don't."

Regina pulled back from the blonde and looked her in the eyes. Her gaze was intense, and Emma could feel the woman's emotions radiating off of her.

"You do feel it right?"

Emma nodded silently.

"Do you not desire it to continue?"

"I do," Emma said then looked down breaking the intense gaze.

"But?"

"But, to get you back, all of you back, I'm willing to sacrifice my own happiness."

"You think you are happy... with me?" Regina asked incredulously and scrutinized the blonde for deception.
Emma cupped Regina's cheek and gently ran her thumb over a defined cheekbone. "You, Your Grace, look at me the way I've only ever dreamed you would. Even if you are plotting your escape or a way to get the upper hand." Regina feigned shock and mock offense and the Savior smirked, "I always know when you are lying to me, Regina."

She cupped the Queen's cheek and looked her in the eyes and said, "You have years of memories of our son growing up, memories I know you don't want to lose. I don't think I can force you, but…"

The Queen sank back into the embrace of the Savior and rested her head on the blonde's muscular shoulder. "May I take some time and consider it?"

"You may," Emma ran her fingers through soft dark hair soaking in the feeling of closeness they shared at that moment.

If she was being honest with herself, she was going to miss this side of Regina. It wasn't just that she was pure sex in hell heels, or that that sexiness was often pointed in Emma's direction, no, definitely not that. It was, however, her unbridled passion that she would miss, it was something the Mayor just did not possess. She dragged the stone over steel and watched as Regina filled page after page of her book. A sound knock at the door startled the Savior from her musings, and she sheathed her sword and stood to go answer the door.

Xena stood with a sheepish grin and an arm full of supplies. "So? Are we going to have a problem?"

Emma hung her shoulders down and swept the warrior princess into the main living area. "I told her I wouldn't force her."

"Perhaps convince her means something else in your land?" Xena asked with a raised eyebrow.

"She has good reason to be afraid. I can't make her. I just can't Xena," Emma shook her blonde head and tried not to look into those blue steel eyes.

"You mean you won't," Xena corrected with a smirk.

"Maybe," the blonde considered for a moment and added, "I love her."

"Too much perhaps?"

"Maybe."

"Emma?" the musical voice of her Queen beckoned her from the other room and Emma held up a finger to Xena with pleading eyes silently asking her to wait.

"Yes, my Queen?" Emma quickly walked over to where Regina was sitting at the desk. Her diary was closed, and she looked visibly shaken. "Are you alright?"

"That warrior, she is here for…." Regina's face held a mere fraction of the fear she felt.

"Yes, my Queen. Have you made a decision?"

"Are you really allowing me to choose?"

"I know you have little to no control over your life, even as you are now you are tied to the throne and are a slave to the magic. I don't know what will happen if you stop taking the antidote before gaining all of your memories back, but I told you I wouldn't force you. I intend on keeping my
word." Emma knelt in front of the Evil Queen, a mere shadow of the beast she was made out to be. "I can't lose you, Regina. I think it will kill me." Regina lifted Emma's chin to meet her gaze and caressed the Sheriff's cheek with the soft pad of her thumb.

"Tell me you love me and I will do this for you."

Emma's eyes looked up in surprise, and she immediately replied, "I love you, Regina."

"Not now you imbecile!" Regina rolled her eyes and took in a patience gathering breath. "When my memories return!"

"Oh…" Emma broke her gaze and bit the inside of her lip and truly considered for a moment just agreeing with whatever the Queen desired as long as she complied with taking the antidote.

"And don't you even think about lying to Your Queen! Promise me you will tell me how you feel about me when I am rid of this ailment, and I will submit to your torture."

"I… I don't know if I can do that Regina."

"You can and you will girl!" The brunette leaned in close and whispered into Emma's ear, "No matter who I turn out to be, be certain I am in desperate need of your love." She placed the sweetest of kisses upon Emma's cheek as she drew back in her seat and waited for the Sheriff's response.

Emma nodded her head in agreement because she was unable to voice her acceptance. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and the lump in her throat was preventing her from voicing her response. She clamped her trembling jaw tight and pulled her lips together in what should have been a smile had the edges of her mouth not been drawn down.

"Good girl," the Queen praised.

Emma helped the Evil Queen change and put her to bed as she's done before, she sat behind the woman and held her while Xena administered the antidote. Emma stroked Regina's dark locks and cradled her head to her chest. After the initial poke, Regina relaxed, be it the release of her anxiety or the drug-like effect of the medicine itself. She leaned into the embrace of the Savior who held her.

Xena circled the bed and gave the women some privacy as she packed up her medical kit on the other side of the room.

"Emma?" the Queen's voice was soft and Emma could tell she was already feeling the effects of the antidote entering her bloodstream.

"Shh, I got you, Regina, I won't let you go." Emma held her until she succumbed to the medicine.

"Xena?" Emma called after the warrior who was making her way out of the room.

"Yeah?" Xena replied turning around to face the blonde.

"Do you have anyone to spare for an hour or so to sit with Regina? I feel the need to do some drills."

"Bad day?"

"Just really overwhelming." Lost green eyes told the warrior just how much Emma needed something, anything, to hold her together.
"Yeah I'll see what Gabby is doing, you and I can spar if you want."

Emma tried to smile her appreciation, "Thank you."

The warrior smiled warmly back at the haunted look of the blonde on the bed. "Anytime. I'll be back."
Emma came back to her hut exhausted after a blistering work out with the warrior princess. She exchanged a few words, or rather grunts with Gabrielle and then passed out on her cot.

Her sleep was restless, even in her exhaustion. She had vivid nightmares containing all of the disturbing facts she had learned about her friend during this unexpected trip. Her dreams were fleeting, and she felt the overwhelming helplessness gnawing at her.

The worst of which had her on a ledge standing on a small outcrop of rock trying to reach Henry and Regina who were further up the side of the cliff. Every foothold she found in the sheer rock face crumbled with her weight. They were calling for help, and she couldn't reach them. She could see that their own ledge was crumbling back a little at a time and she could do nothing but watch in horror as they inched closer and closer to the edge.

She jerked awake as her dream-self lunged forward towards her falling family as they plummeted into the quickly approaching green and purple whirling portal.

It was mid-morning by the looks of the sun outside the window, and she rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she sat up on her cot. Her body felt drained, and as she looked over to her sleeping charge, she sighed knowing that her dreams had been just a manifestation of her helplessness in this situation. She feared that their ordeal was not yet over.

How much longer will she subject Regina to the stressful antidote? How much more could her body take? What would happen if they stopped before she gained back her memories? Could she bring the brunette home to their son with no memories of ever being his mother?

These questions had her lost until a knock on the door pulled her from her thoughts. She opened the wooden door to a young brunette amazon holding a basket of light finger foods.

"The Queen has asked this be delivered if you miss breakfast, your highness," the Amazon held onto the basket with a nervous, shy smile.

"Just Emma," Emma mumbled rubbing her eyes. "Hi I mean, thanks, um… We haven't met," she said expectantly.

"No, Emma. I am Solari. I am one of the queen's personal guards left behind to charge village security in the absence of Eponin and am second in command after Magdalus…"

"Right, the uh attack. They left already?"

"Yes. Early this morning." The brunette handed the basket to Emma but didn't seem like she was in a hurry to leave, so Emma invited her in.

"Thank you." The brunette said with a smile. "I did have ulterior motives for bringing by your breakfast," she said stiffly.

"I gathered that the head of security, especially in Eponin's absence, has better things to do than be a delivery girl," Emma said offhandedly, as she put the basket down on one of the chairs in the main greeting room.
"Yes," The brunette smiled shyly. "I understand you are a capable warrior."

"I can use a sword," Emma agreed.

"I could use your help on watch this afternoon," Solari got to her point.

Emma nervously looked back towards her bedroom to the sleeping queen. "I… Okay. I mean I'd like to help. I mean, I can help, but I won't leave Regina alone."

"We are not expecting an assault. We just need bodies. The bulk of our warriors as you know have been drafted for the siege, and although our younglings are capable, we have few that are tall enough to help with the watch."

"I get it," Emma smiled. "Okay, just tell me where you want me, and later this afternoon would be better." Thinking to herself that whoever wakes up in the other room is going to need time before she'll trust Emma.

"I'll send a girl to collect you after lunch," Solari said pleased for the help.

Emma heard her queen stir and panic crossed her face, "Okay. I need to go help her, so…"

"Right," Solari took the hint and let herself out as Emma took the basket and briskly entered the back room.

Regina rubbed her eyes and rolled over.

The window is in the wrong place.

It took but a moment for her to realize she was not in her bedroom and this was different. It was all different. Different did not happen. Not ever. She bolted straight up and looked around the immediate vicinity. A tall blonde woman with a kind smile came over to the bed she was in and said her name and sat on the edge.

"Are you in any pain?" the blonde asked her. She shook her head even though her muscles ached and she had the start of a headache.

"Do you know who I am?" The woman asked, and she shook her head again. Her throat felt very dry, and her head began to pound relentlessly. She pulled the covers off of herself and tried to sit up.

"Hey. Okay. You're safe Regina. I'm Emma Swan. I'm your friend, and you are safe. Okay?" The soft, caring look in the girl's green eyes did indeed calm her a little; however, she still felt the flight or fight instinct and adrenaline surged within her veins.

"Here." The blonde, she now knew as Emma, handed her a wooden cup filled with a clear liquid. "It's water. I know you are thirsty," she explained with a kind shy smile.

"Wh-where am I?" the mayor croaked.

"What was the last thing you remember?" the blonde girl countered.

"No, you tell me where I am this instant!" The mayor demanded, her body started to shake, and she tried to stand, her flight instinct winning out over her fight. Not that she wouldn't fight, she'd do that as well, but she needed to get away.

This is a dream. A very vivid dream. That's all. It must be. The mayor recited to herself even
though it did not feel like a dream, it felt real, and when the pain from her stitches shot up from the bottom of her feet when she tried to stand she knew deep down, this was not a dream. Not at all.

"Okay, it's okay Regina, calm down."

"This is different!" the mayor shook her head in her disbelief. "That isn't possible!" She tried to stand once again, and the blonde helped steady her. She was able to see out of the window to a whole new world that was decidedly not her Storybrooke, and she swooned into the strong arms of the girl known as Emma.

"Let's sit for a little bit okay? The antidote takes a lot out of you Regina. I need you to just chill out for me okay?" The mayor realized she was holding onto the girl's white cotton shirt tightly and the woman's arms were wrapped around her. She shook her head and murmured, "No," and pushed the girl off of her, but sat back down on the bed nonetheless.

"You were poisoned, and your memories have been affected. I need to know what you remember, will you please answer me?"

Regina put her hand to her head, her heart was thundering in her ears and the slight headache she woke with was now pounding in tandem with her pulse. "I.. I don't know," Regina replied, the headache and shock of waking up no longer in the cursed town of her own making, prevented her from forming an answer to the question.

"Does your head hurt?" Emma asked her, and she nodded. "Okay, lay back down my queen, I'll get you something for the pain. You need to tell me if anything else hurts, it is important." The mayor stiffened at the use of title she hadn't heard in over 15 years, her eyes grew wide as she watched the blonde bring back another cup, this one with herbs floating on top of the water and Regina took it and downed it.

Was Storybrooke a dream?

Tears started to pool at the thought of not ever enacting her revenge and Emma tried to soothe her. "Hey you're okay," the sweet almost familiar tone started to put her mind at ease. However, she flinched when the girl's hand tried to caress her hair, her hair that was much too long, but not as long as it was when she was queen. Emma pulled back from her attempted touches with a tight sad smile. "It's okay," the girl said once more soothing her. The pain reliever helped her almost instantly, and she visibly relaxed against the pillows of her bed.

She handed the girl the empty cup and cleared her throat. "I am mayor of a town called Storybrooke," she announced. This information seemed to please the girl who smiled and nodded. "That's great. That's so good. Okay, tell me who is Henry?"

"M-my father. What do you know of my father?" The mayor peered at the woman with distrust. The pleasure that the soft green eyes held just a moment before seemed to slip away, and she broke her gaze and cleared her throat. "Nothing much Madam Mayor."

"Where am I?" the mayor demanded once again with less patience than she felt.

"You and I are in another realm. We are stuck here. I am your friend and your Sheriff… "

"Graham is my Sheriff," she interjected. Things don't change. This is ludicrous.

The blonde's eyes grew sadder yet and nodded her head, "Graham had an.. um.. accident, and as his deputy, I took his position. A-after he died."
Shock didn't entirely cover the emotion she felt at this news. *Was this even possible?*

"I'm sorry Madam Mayor, I know you cared for him."

"I didn't care for him!" Regina snapped.

"Oh, I just thought because you know..." the blonde shrugged her shoulders slightly.

Regina couldn't mask the surprise she felt and lifted a sculpted eyebrow towards the blonde who seemed to know much more than she was saying. "Because you know what exactly Sheriff?" She spat the title as if it were undeserving as that is precisely how she felt.

"Nothing," the blonde backed tracked seemingly not wanting to fight, but Regina had her fur up. She was frightened and angry and angry about being frightened, and this imposter of a sheriff was as good as any to unleash her wrath.

"That's right. You know *nothing*, Miss Swan!"

The tone in the mayor's voice seemed to stimulate the blonde's own fight instinct deep within her, and she hardened her features. "Look," her green eyes peered through accusatory slits. "I get that you are upset and freaking out, but we are not going back to how it was when we first met. You are not going to use me as your personal whipping... person! Whatever it was you did with Graham, I really don't care! Frankly, I don't even want to know! He was a person, and I know you two were close, and he's gone, and that sucks, but just because you are upset about his death, doesn't mean you can take it out on me!"

Shock crossed the cool features of the mayor, "We were not close Miss Swan! He was mine. He belonged to me!" The mayor shouted in her frustration but then covered her mouth when she realized that no one was supposed to know how the woodsman belonged to her. That she held his heart for decades. She controlled his every action, his every desire, was hers.

Emma looked unphased by this news and countered, "Whatever! You're still not taking your "loss" out on me, no matter how you are feeling it right now!"

Emma eyed the mayor and noticed when the color drained from her face at her impromptu admission. "We are friends Regina. I know exactly how he was yours. Whatever, okay? It doesn't matter anymore," she added hoping her insider knowledge would buy her some trust with the mayor.

"You know? How?"

*Oh you know because I'm the savior and Snow White's daughter and broke your curse and all that.*

"You and I are very close."

Regina scoffed and looked at her with disgust and Emma couldn't help the feeling of rejection, and she suddenly ached to have the Evil Queen return for just one more day. She took a deep breath in and continued, "Listen, believe what you will about our relationship, but what is important here is that you are safe here with me, you are sick, but you are getting better." Emma got up from the bed and retrieved the mayor's clothing she was wearing when they came to this land and handed them to Regina. "Get dressed, we'll eat some breakfast, and then the village needs our help with the watch."

Emma dressed in her regular clothes, mostly to put the mayor's mind at ease, and set out the basket
of goodies the bard thoughtfully placed aside for them. They sat, and she answered a few of Regina's questions about this world they were in and explained why she couldn't tell her too much about her life because of the poison and broken psyche's and whatnot. This seemed to have appeased the mayor, and she stopped asking. Emma explained the attacks on the Amazon nation and the siege led by Xena. The famous figure did not ring any bells to the mayor, which told Emma that Regina's mind frame was well before the time she got Henry.

"So why did you ask about my father?"

"Um, what?" Emma asked spreading something that tasted like butter churned honey onto a piece of bread.

"When I first woke up, you asked me who my father was. Why would you think I would forget him if my memory remembers some parts of my life and not others? It doesn't make sense not to remember the man who raised me," the mayor stated plainly.

"Oh, right, um..." Emma thought about just lying, the topic of Henry did not go well with the Evil Queen, but she does have insider knowledge this time around... and she told the queen of the boy with no adverse reaction before so...

"I wasn't asking about your dad," Emma said and took a bite of her bread and hummed her appreciation.

The mayor countered, "Who else would you have been talking about dear?" Emma could see the mistrust in those dark pools taking in her every move.

"Our son."

"Excuse me?"

"Our son Henry. I needed to know if you remembered him or not so I could tell how much more of your memory you got back from the last dose of antidote."

"I have a son?"

"We do, yes."

"Oh." The mayor took this information in and mulled it around then exclaimed, "Oh!" and stared at the blonde mouth agape.

"What?"

"We have a child, together?" the brunette asked letting her eyes fall to appreciate the lithe frame of the blonde before her.

"Yeah?" Emma replied still not understanding what the mayor was asking her but was hoping to bypass the 'you're a liar' portion of the interrogation. "I gave birth to him, but he is ours."

"Oh," the mayor said again then stark realization hit her soft features. "I'm a-a-m mom?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yeah," Emma smiled at the woman who sat across from her in quiet amazement.

"Will I remember him? I mean, when. When will I remember him?" Regina asked with a desperate need plainly visible within her eyes.
"Soon I hope. You'll need more antidote, but we can't give you more until the girls come back from their siege." Emma smiled a crooked little half smile and eased the tenseness she felt in her shoulders and took a deep breath. *This is better. She is getting better.*

"Wait. You said we are in another realm? Where is he?" Regina looked panicked.

"He is home in Storybrooke. We have friends and family who are looking after him."

"No Emma he needs us. He needs his parents!" 

"We have a plan to get home to him, I promise, but you need to get better okay? My top priority is healing *you*." 

Regina frowned at this information but seemed to accept it with a nod.

"We can help with the watch this afternoon, but tomorrow I was thinking…" The blonde said tentatively. "I was hoping you could teach me how to ride a horse? Gabby said there's a nice trail north of the village. What do you say?" The hope was evident in Emma's eyes but so was the uncertainty in Regina's.

"Oh, I don't know, I haven't ridden in..."

"I know, but I don't ride at all, you'll look like a pro in comparison to me, I promise." Emma could see the turmoil within the brunette and made a rather bold guess, "Is it because of Daniel?"

Regina grew rigid in her shock, "I... I..."

"We don't have to go into the stables," Emma offered, hoping to circumvent the source of the brunette's hesitation.

"No. We can. I mean, we will need to. The horses we ride will need to trust us, Emma, we can't just get on one like a motorcycle, they are self-aware," the mayor gently snipped.

Emma smiled, "You think I ride a motorcycle?"

Regina gestured to the leather jacket hanging on the back of a chair, "I know that isn't mine darling," the brunette said with a smirk.

Emma chuckled, "You do have much finer tastes, your grace." Emma noticed Regina flinch at her and pulled her eyebrows down in thought. "What?" Emma asked curiously.

"Why..." the question seemed to get stuck within her and so Regina cleared her throat and tried once more. "Why do you address me by my titles? If we are... if we have a child together?"

"Oh," Emma's face flushed with embarrassment. "I sorta got used to it, for the last week or so you only remembered up till the time you were queen and kinda demanded I address you with respect," Emma said with a sheepish grin. "I'm sorry, I didn't notice I was still..."

Regina smiled shyly, accepted the blonde's apology, and thought it was endearing. "It's quite alright. It isn't something we normally do then?"

Emma chuckled and shook her head no as she stood to clear away their breakfast plates. "Shame," the mayor added as her eyes strolled down Emma's lean muscular form and then smiled smugly at the deer in headlights look on the blonde's face.

Emma shook her head and chuckled, "Alright let's go your majesty. We've got watch duty."
Belle found mention of the realm Emma and Regina seemingly portaled to. There was very little in the way of details, but they found the name given to the domain by the Dark One who discovered it. There wasn't much information on the realm named Elysia; generalized land masses and a detailed description of a magical planetary body made of a very specific kind of rock that bore forth beings similar to fairies of the enchanted forest. They were born of the mineral within the stone and were ageless, immortal magical beings that ruled over the land, and it's inhabitants.

It seemed as though this rock was of much interest to that iteration of the Dark One and much study went into it. Not much else of the land was of interest to the him, so there was nothing of the people or their culture.

"This realm seems to have magic dear, as long as it does, this locator spell will work and what we send through the portal will get to the Savior," Rumple informed the Princess.

"And we are sure it has magic?"

"It is likely, dearie. It was quite difficult for me to find this world we live in, it seems as though magicless realms are quite rare indeed."

"We need to send something to help her find her way back home," Snow said aloud more to herself. Ruby took the Princess by the elbow and pulled her to the front of Mr. Gold's shop out of earshot from the Dark One.

"Wha-?" Snow tried to keep her balance as she was unceremoniously dragged to the front door.

"I have a bean," Red whispered plainly.

"What?" Snow was surprised and confused. "Why?"

"When we were in the Enchanted Forest, I felt like I needed to get away from the looks and stares and judgment of being a wolf. So I got my hands on one. We were all cursed before I could use it, so I still have it."

"Oh…” Snow replied still processing the information. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You kinda had a lot going on Snow."

"I'm your best friend!" the Princess loudly exclaimed. Hurt clearly written across her face. "You could just leave me? I was to be queen! I would have helped you! How could you even think about leaving me?"

"You have Charming. You don't need me," Ruby said sadly, holding in her true feelings. "I was saving it. After the curse broke, I thought I could travel and find adventure or something, but getting Emma back is more important."

"Oh," the White Princess replied as her friend shocked her once more. Tears stung the back of Snow White's eyes, and she turned from the tall brunette and worried her lip.

"Snow…” Ruby tried and put her hand on the princess' shoulder only to have it jerked away.

"No!" The brunette seethed, "I would have woken up one day, and you would have been gone. No
explanation, nothing! Do I mean so little to you?" she turned back around expecting an answer.

"You know that isn't…"

"Save it," Snow snapped and put her hand up stopping the wolf mid-sentence. She spun back around and addressed the imp, "Mr. Gold, I will get a package together for my daughter. How soon can we send it."

"It will take some time, and manpower to track a portal, they are unpredictable as you well know."

"Fine I will have my husband," she side glanced her sulking friend, "organize something. I'll be in touch." With that, she turned and marched out of the shop, Ruby hot on her heels.

Halfway up the street, Ruby was trotting lightly to keep up with the visibly perturbed Princess. "My car is the other way Snow."

The short brunette huffed, "I'll walk, thank you very much!"

"Will you slow down at least?" Ruby tried once more and then grabbed the little woman by the arm whipping her around, "What is your problem?"

"YOU!" Snow yelled when she was finally facing the tall wolf. "You are my problem Red! You were just going to leave!? How could you even think about doing that? How could you hurt me like that?!"

"Hurt you?! How do you think I feel?" Ruby shouted back at her effectively silencing the princess' temper tantrum. "I sit on the sidelines and have to watch…" thick tears brimmed the wolf's green eyes.

"You are hardly on the sidelines Red! There is plenty of adventure here! Why do you think you need to be away from your friends and family to find adventure?!" Snow exclaimed.

"It isn't just about adventure!" Red yelled back at her.

"What is it then?"

"I needed a change!"

"Why?! What does some other realm have that we don't!"

"I need…"

"What?!"

"I need to find my own happy ending! And I'm not going to find that here!"

"How do you know!? Your happily-ever-after could be right under your nose!"

"Because she is married to her true love already!" Ruby shouted back and then clasped her hands over her mouth trying to push the words back down her throat.

Snow demanded, "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Nothing. Nevermind," Ruby folded her arms over her chest and turned and walked back in the direction of her Mustang.
Snow called chasing after her, "No! You owe me an explanation!"

"I don't owe you anything Snow," Ruby threw back over her shoulder.

"I think I deserve an explanation Red." The school teacher put her hand on her friend's arm stopping her from her stalking away and circled to face her friend. "We've been friends for a lifetime. Talk to me. Please?"

Ruby rolled her eyes as tears breached her lashes and fell down her cheeks. "I can't." She shook her head and avoided the green gaze that searched over her features.

Snow shook her head at the leggy brunette and said sadly, "You can tell me anything Red. I will love you no matter what."

Ruby took a deep breath and clasped the shorter brunette's cheeks with the palms of her hands and drew her in close, kissing her gently on her ruby red lips. She pulled back from the stunned Princess and whispered into the space between them, "You will never love me how I want you to Snow." She let go of the woman and continued to jog up the street, passed her car and into the wooded area behind Gold's shop.

Snow White stood still, pale cool fingers pressed against her own heated lips in shock over what had just happened. After several long moments, she turned to see that her friend was gone. She furrowed her brow and walked home.

The captain of the frontal assault knelt down hidden away between the multicolored brush and watched the young girls change the guard.

"Captain, we were instructed to always have our masks on so people will know who we are with," the young upstart complained.

"Those silver masks clash against the natural setting of the hillside, and we will be seen. Use your brain," the captain said casually, ignoring the young soldier's unwavering adherence to protocol.

"We were also instructed to assess the harlot's attack against the hooves sir!"

The man, suddenly irritated at the young man's questioning of his leadership, bit, "Do you think I'm deaf, boy?"

"N-no sir," the young man shook his curly blonde head so hard his silver mask slipped, forcing him to steady it back into place with his hands.

The captain ripped the mask from the boy's face and grabbed him around the back of his neck craning him to look towards the village of young women. "Now don't you think these lovely, untouched beauties are a better assignment?" The captain reached his hand down between the boy's legs and grabbed ahold of his semi-stiff member and began to stroke him as he whispered into his ear, "Do you see how few harlots there are, boy?"

The frightened boy nodded, tears started to stream down his cheeks as he felt his manhood grow stiff under the rough touch of his leader.

"Obviously the bitches have attacked the witless brutes," he said as he squeezed the boy's newly aroused member causing him to double over. The captain put his free hand up over the boy's mouth. "Shhhh boy. I'll forgive your insubordination this one time because we are going to feast on virgin Amazon pussy tonight, but question me again and I'll sodomize you with your own cock. Do I
make myself clear?" The boy nodded his head adamantly as the commanding officer let him go and turned to the rest of his men. "Rest up men. We ride tonight to take the first spoils of war!"

Emma sat at the table and was cleaning her gun. Busy work was never her strong suit, but she didn't want to disturb the Mayor after the argument they had before dinner.

"It belongs to me. I should be able to read it, Miss Swan."

"It does, and you can, but I don't want you to freak out."

"Why would I," the Mayor used air quotes to punctuate her disapproval of the blonde's vernacular, "freak out."

"I don't know. I don't know what's in there. You weren't you, and you weren't always happy with me, and we had such a good day today Regina, I just don't want you to…" Emma searched for another way to put freak out but came up short.

"Freak out," the brunette deadpanned.

"Yeah?" Emma scrunched up her face with a half smile and shrugged her shoulders.

"Your extensive vocabulary is awe inspiring. Please tell me our son is literate."

"He can read, Regina!"

"Yes, but is he articulate?"

"Uh… yeah?"

"Do you know what that means?"

"It means you can talk and stuff!" the Sheriff flashed a sly smile that clued the Mayor in on the fact she was poking fun at her.

Regina rolled her eyes. "You are an idiot," she punctuated her displeasure by resting her hands on her hips.

"Yes, but you love me anyway."

"That remains to be seen," the brunette flashed her own smile when the blonde registered her words and lost the teasing grin she had a moment before.

"Even though you have no right to keep it from me," the brunette folded her arms in defiance, "If I promise not to get upset, may I please read through it?"

That was how the Queen won the argument and was now reading through her own diary. Emma shook her head as she side glanced the scowl on the Queen's face. She knew this was a terrible idea and she worried as she lit two more candles which allowed her to see better and removed the barrel from her gun. She collected passable cleaning supplies from Solari that afternoon, it wasn't perfect, but it did the job. She would clean her service piece properly when she got home, but in the meantime, she didn't need the gun jamming if she really needed it.

She heard a commotion outside and then a scream. Alarmed, she jumped from the table and ran to the window.
"What is it Emma?" the Mayor asked with concern.

"I don't know," the Sheriff mumbled, the heat from the hut had fogged the window making it difficult to see out. "Stay here." She picked up her sword and started toward the door.

The Mayor discarded her diary on the bed and rushed over to the blonde, "Emma! Wait!"

"I just want to see what's going on out there. It doesn't sound right, okay?" She cracked open the hut door and saw chaos. Men. Men were carrying little girls and fighting the older teens. "Shit," she said under her breath. She closed the door and took the Mayor's hand and dragged her back into the bedroom. She blew out the candles that were lit and instructed Regina to hide under the bed.

"No! Don't leave me, Emma, please!" Regina's eyes held the doubt she felt in that moment and held onto the Savior's hand with a fierce grip.

"I'm not leaving you. I need to help them, they are little girls, and those men are going to hurt them! I need to know you are safe. Please? I won't leave you behind I promise! Just hide Regina. I will be right back."

Regina wrapped her arms around the Sheriff, and Emma pressed her lips into a brown crown. She took out her carving knife and gave it to the Queen. "Get under the bed and don't come out for anyone but me."

Proper fear showed in the black eyes of her love even in the darkness of the room, fear, and uncertainty that mirrored her own. The brunette nodded her head and complied with the Sheriff's wishes.

Emma opened the front of the hut and drew her sword, slipping out and closing it tight she looked around. There were only three soldiers in the vicinity, two of which were engaged in battle with several Amazon teens who seemed to be holding their own, the third, however, had a young preteen, a blonde girl Emma recognized, bloodied, beaten and bound, flung over his shoulder. Her much younger sister was futilely punching his leather-clad thigh as he stalked away.

Emma ran closer to the scene; her hands shaking with adrenaline she yelled, "HEY!" Then held up her sword to him as he turned to face her. He lifted the silver mask from his face and grinned at what he found. "Now that's more like it," he hissed and dropped the tween to the ground at his feet. He unsheathed his sword and grinned like a madman as he attacked.

Emma had been sparring with Xena for over a month now, it wasn't daily, but she did picked up a thing or two her father wouldn't have been able to teach her. The blonde held her own against the warrior and sucker-punched him during a parry, and just as she started to think perhaps she would win against him he looked up at her, spit blood from his broken mouth and grinned. "I'm going to split you in two girl!"

He came at the Sheriff, and she faltered back against his blows, he was fast and the tip of his sword sliced through her abdomen as he swiped and lunged. He knocked her off balance and with a loud clang he disarmed her. She fell back on her elbows and tried to scurry back to get back up. He leered at her as if he were starving and she was an all you can eat buffet as he slowly stalked toward her.

_Oh god. Regina. I'm sorry._

A small pale hand appeared on his forehead bending his head back, and a silver blade opened his neck. Warm blood sprayed over the Savior, and her face mirrored the shock in the dying soldier's.
She watched as the light faded from the man's eyes as his life's blood pulsed out over her. The two little girl's she attempted to rescue ran to her and helped her up. The tween wiped the blood off of the knife she had used to kill the soldier, and her younger sister hugged Emma and exclaimed, "Fank you Cherriff!"

Emma nodded and patted the girl. The blood that covered her arms and hands had started to get tacky, and she finally noticed she was covered when the little blonde girl pulled away from her embrace and the side of her head was covered in a syrupy brown that stained her blonde hair. The tween ran a few steps and launched the blade she had into the back of another soldier who was attacking another one of her sisters. Emma shook her head trying to clear her shock away. "Solari. We need to get the younglings to Solari," she mumbled.

"EMMAAAAA!" she heard someone scream her name behind her.

Regina?!

Emma picked up her sword and ran back towards her hut. The only thing she could focus on was the fact that the door to her hut was ajar.

Regina!

Her heart thundered in her chest, and she felt like she was running under water. Isn't it like every nightmare you've ever had where you are trying to get to the one you love, but everything goes into slow motion? You can never move quick enough. You can never get there in time. You always lose.

Regina laid still in the dark under the bed when she heard the door slam open. She listened to the cries and battle sounds coming in from outside. Thick heavy footsteps shuffled into the hut. Labored open mouth breathing filled the silence in the air. Pieces of Emma's service weapon clattered to the wooden floor, and a man grunted. She saw his leather-bound feet as they crept closer to the bed. She covered her mouth and held her breath, hoping he would move on.

He dropped to his knees and peered under the bed. "Well what do we have here?" he grinned from under a silver metal mask. He reached under the bed to grab at the woman, and she stabbed him with Emma's little knife.

He screamed and pulled back his hand, her knife sticking out of it still. He ripped the blade from his torn flesh and threw it across the room as he spat, "Bitch!" He reached back under the bed and was met with a barrage of fists. His fingers found hair, and he grabbed a fist full and dragged the woman out from under the bed still punching at him.

"EMMAAAAA!" Regina screamed, and he belted her across the face with his non-injured hand. The force of the blow stunned her long enough for him to climb on top of her. He sat astride her hips and smiled wide as he looked down at her. "Oh yes you are perfect," he hissed as he caressed her cheek dragging his dirty fingers down her neck; she started to fight him again shaking herself from the daze of the blow. He chuckled, "I'm going to take my time with you, little miss."

The Queen saw his sinister grin fade almost instantly and then a tip of a blade forced its way through his breast quickly. It sliced through his tunic so fast Regina wasn't certain if she actually saw it. The material that covered his chest grew dark as his blood spilled from the wound. The man leaned over and dismounted the Mayor and stood up to face his attacker. Regina looked to see a blood-soaked Sheriff silent, stoic and rigid in a battle stance.

The soldier lumbered toward the blonde, and with one fluid motion, she disemboweled him. He
looked up at her in disbelief then back down at his intestine that he now clutched. He dropped to his knees and then fell to the floor. His, being the second pair of eyes to lose their light before the blonde that night.

Regina scrambled up and jumped into the Sheriff's arms. "Thank you," she whispered and held her Savior tight.

"We need to find Maggie and Solari," Emma mumbled still looking down at the dead eyes staring back at her. The brunette nodded her agreement and grabbed the bow and quiver that sat in the corner then clasped the blonde's hand and dragged her from the hut.

As soon as the pair reached the outside, mayhem still surged as they saw fighting all around them. Regina removed an arrow from the quiver and landed a clean shot through the neck of a soldier across the courtyard. A second arrow buried itself into a leather chest, straight through the heart. A third found an eye socket. Emma fought off another soldier who attempted to take out the archer only to have Regina's arrow find his heart as well. Emma turned and looked at the brunette with wide eyes, "I felt that whiz by my cheek Regina."

"Don't worry dear, you were not my target," a sly grin split the Mayor's face and a fire in her eyes shone bright. Emma gulped and then nodded. They worked their way through the village helping and gathering children along the way. They finally found Maggie who was organizing several of the older children to put out a fire that started in one of the larger war prep tents.

"Emma! Thank the gods! We need to get the girls up to the cavern on the other side of the mountain!"

"Where is Solari?"

Maggie shook her head, "I don't know, but I believe we have them on the run, there weren't many of them, an advance party no doubt."

"We'll start herding the kids to the safety of the cavern," Regina said looking back to Emma for approval. Emma nodded, and Regina started gathering the dozen or so young girls and followed Emma's direction toward the cave system.

The Mayor took charge and instructed a few of the older teens to calm the younger children and set up the makeshift camp within the cave. They got a fire started, and she was passing out water from the spring feed. Once she was satisfied that the girls were operating to her satisfaction, the Mayor turned her attention to her Savior.

What was once long blonde hair was stained dark and hung limply in wet curls around her shoulders. Regina brought over a cloth and a bucket of water and began to remove the dirt and blood from the Emma's face and arms. Dark eyes widened when she noticed the girl was injured. She exclaimed, "Miss Swan! Lay back, let me look at your wound." The faraway look in the face of her Sheriff concerned her but she was happy the girl compiled without complaint. She lifted the bloody shirt and cleaned the area. The gash hadn't sliced through muscle, but she could see it was deep enough to reach the fatty layer beneath the skin. "You need stitches, Emma."

The brunette quickly sought out one of the older girls who tracked down a medical kit that was taken from the healer's hut. She came back and knelt next to Emma, and spoke to her gently, "This is going to really, really hurt, but we need to close this wound." She opened up the kit and took out familiar supplies. Washing the wound out with water, and then with a flask of what smelled like alcohol, Regina began to stitch the pale skin together.
Emma flinched but held still while the Mayor tended to her. She knew she was going into shock; she couldn't stop playing the evening's events over in her mind. *She had almost been killed. Regina could have been killed. I took his life without a thought. He was hurting her.*

*You are the Savior, not a killer. You killed him.*

*He would have killed her. He would have hurt her and killed her.*

The Mayor finished dressing the wound and then focused on the turmoil that shown in her Sheriff’s face. She brushed back the blood-stained strands of hair from her face then spoke, "Thank you for coming back for me, Emma. For saving me." Green eyes focused for the first time since they escaped the village and rested on the dark features of her friend.

"I shouldn't have left you," she said just above a whisper. "I took his life without a second thought. I didn't try to maim him. I went straight for the kill. What kind of person does that?"

The Mayor bent down and kissed the younger woman's forehead, "Someone who was protecting the woman she loves."

"You remember?" Emma snapped to attention, hope filled her eyes but was immediately dashed when the brunett shook her head no.

Regina pulled a tight smile and continued cleaning off the dirt from the Sheriff's face and said, "I mentioned it in my diary. We also have a son together, so I put two and two together."

Emma sat up with a jolt, "Woah, uh we… I mean.."

"It's alright Emma. I wasn't entirely surprised by the news. You are quite beautiful, and as you said, I do have finer tastes," she said with a sly smile.

Emma was shocked out of her shock by the admission of her friend, and she thought perhaps that's why this whole transition was so easy because Regina believed they are in a relationship. Emma thought back to the trouble she had with the Evil Queen and what the woman said to her before she submitted to the last dose.

*Lie. It's only a few days a week tops.* Emma looked into the soft eyes of the Mayor and shook her head. "I do love you, Regina. I-I mean I'm in lo-"

A commotion brought the Sheriff's attention to the front of the cave. Magdalus entered the mouth of the cave carrying a wounded Solari over her shoulder. Emma scrambled up to assist the older woman to move the warrior to a spot near the other injured.

"Is she..." Wild green eyes searched the older Amazon for answers.

"She has simply lost consciousness," Magdalus answered the unasked question. Regina knelt next to the unconscious warrior and felt the back of her head for lumps. She tilted the warrior's head back and then rolled her on her side, bending her knee up to hold her in that position. Magdalus looked to Emma and then questioned the brunette, "What are you doing?"

"She has a concussion, most likely. I assume you don't know how hard she was hit to knock her unconscious, but the lump on the back of her head leads me to believe it was severe. If she starts to vomit this position will prevent her from aspirating."

Emma looked at her friend in awe, "How do you know how to do that?"
"I've had some time on my hands Miss Swan," the Mayor drawled with a poignant eyebrow raise.

"Thank you dearheart," the healer expressed to the brunette and then guided her to the other young women who were in need and injured.

After assisting Magdalus with several of the more seriously wounded, Regina gathered some of the younger children who were clearly frightened and sat them down around the fire.

"How many of you know the tale of Snow White?" the brunette asked the children with a wide wicked smile. Several small little hands shot up into the air with a barrage of "Me Me" and "I do I do!"

"Well you may have heard of the poor Princess, but what about her poor stepmother?"

"The Evil Queen!" the children shouted with glee.

"Yes!" Regina hissed with the same level of exuberance, "What the legend and stories don't tell you is why the Evil Queen hunted down the Princess Snow White!"

"It was because the magic mirror said Snow White was prettier than the Queen!" a little redhead exclaimed from the back of the group.

Regina chuckled and looked over to Emma and winked. "Clearly the magic mirror was mistaken because there was no other more beautiful than the Queen." A wide-eyed brunette around the age of four lifted her hands to Regina who instantly pulled the little girl to her lap and began caressing her hair soothing the girl. It was so natural for the Mayor, and it touched Emma deep down inside. She knew there would have been no way to be a part of Regina's life when Henry was a baby, but she felt the loss of missing both her son growing up and the woman she loved, care for him during that time.

"But vanity was not the reason why the beautiful Queen hunted the Princess. Do you want to know the real reason?" She asked in an overly excited voice. The children all cried in unison, "Yeahh!"

"Once upon a time…” Regina began the extremely whitewashed version of events that led up to her marrying the King which distracted and put the frightened children at ease.
"I'm just saying, she was practically living here and then suddenly we stop seeing her? It doesn't make sense gramps. And Grandma has been extra super cheery, it's weird. Something happened, I'm sure of it."

"Yeah well if something did happen that's between her and Grandma don't you think?"

Henry looked up to his grandfather's blue eyes, ashamed, "Yeah. I just miss her."

"We all do Henry," the blond replied sadly.

Snow stood in the shadow of the staircase and listened to her husband and grandson's conversation and shook her head. She knew she needed to talk to her friend, but she wasn't sure what exactly to say to her. Charming was her true love. He was her husband. The father of her child. She loved him. No, she was in love with him.

But… Ruby… She loved her too. She did, and she always has. There was a time before the Prince where she thought they had a future. She never pursued it because of the bounty on her head; she never wanted to put Red in danger of drawing the Queen's wrath. As David had.

"David?" She called her husband's name out suddenly, "Can I talk to you for a moment please?"

David arched his eyebrows at Henry who just shrugged in response. "I'll be right there!" He called back to his wife.

Snow showed up on Granny's doorstep and knocked on the glass of the front door. The plump older woman answered it with a gruff, "Oh, it's you."

"Is Red home?" She asked cautiously, uncertain if Ruby told her grandmother what happened or if the old woman was just her ordinarily grumpy self.

"Upstairs," she called over her shoulder as she walked away from the open door.

Snow smiled tightly and closed the door behind her. She could hear the music blasting as she reached the bottom of the stairs. "Get her to turn off that racket, and you'll get free hot chocolate for a month!" she heard Granny call from the kitchen. She took a deep breath and marched up the stairs towards the heavy metal that was so loud it threatened to rattle her bones right out of her body.

She didn't bother knocking. The girl wouldn't have heard her anyway, so she tried to open the door, which was of course locked. She rolled her eyes and took a barrette from her hair and winced as she broke it and bent it into a makeshift lockpick and easily picked the lock to her best friend's bedroom.

The bedroom looked so much like her daughter's it stunned her for a brief moment before she gathered her senses and walked over to the stereo and pulled the plug from the wall, not bothering to try and figure out the high tech tower.

"What the-" Ruby lifted her head off of the bed and turned to look to see what happened.

The two women heard Granny yell from the bottom of the stairs, "THANK YOU, PRINCESS!"
"What are you doing here?" Ruby asked as she sat up from her bed. Her hair was an unruly mess, and her eyes were red-rimmed.

Snow set the plug down and walked over to Ruby who was raking her hands through her hair realizing she didn't look presentable for guests. She stopped in front of the girl, her hands clasped tightly together and announced, "David and Henry miss you." When Ruby's face crumpled into despair, Snow cupped her cheek and lifted her chin, so she made eye contact with her and amended, "I miss you."

"I'm sorry Snow, nothing like that will happen ever again, I swear. I-" Red's words cut off by rose red lips against her own as Snow White leaned into her kiss. Ruby quickly came to her senses and pushed the woman gently back. "No. I can't Snow. Please."

"You're wrong," Snow caressed the wolf's cheek.

"I'm not, I really can't, this hurts too much."

"You are wrong what you said before. I do love you the way you want me to. I always have."

"No. You're with him. He is your true love. Not me."

"That may be, but just because I am in love with him doesn't mean I can't be with you. It doesn't mean I love you any less Red."

Ruby shook her head in disbelief, "It doesn't work that way."

"Who says?"

Ruby stood and started to pace, kicking clothes as she walked the length of her room then decided on, "Everybody!"

"Red, look at me," Ruby stopped and turned to face the little brunette. "Are you jealous of Charming?"

She thought about that for a moment and shook her head no. She really wasn't; she knew how he felt about the Princess, she knew he gave her his all. She wasn't jealous of the love they had together. Sure, she wanted the woman for herself, but she never resented the man for loving her. She completely understood it.

"I don't care what everybody says. They don't have my heart. They don't get to tell me how to love the people I love. They don't get to dictate my family. The only people who have a say in my family are the people I love." Snow wrapped her arms up around the taller woman's shoulders and smiled as Red's slender hands instinctively wrapped themselves around her waist.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying I don't want you to leave me," the pixie-haired woman shook her head and bit back tears that threatened to fall. "Not ever."

"Okay, but what are you actually saying?"

Snow smiled and pulled the wolf down into a searing kiss that got deeper when Ruby parted her lips and Snow claimed the taller woman's mouth with her tongue. They only broke the embrace when breathing became an issue.
"I'm saying you have a place in my family Red, if you want it." Green eyes looked into green eyes and Snow spoke, "I'll ask you the same question I asked Charming," she caressed the taller woman's cheeks with her thumbs then asked, "Would you still love me if you had to share me with him?"

"You asked your husband if he would share you wi-with me?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"He said he already shares me with you. He said he knows you and I have a connection, and he said he would be an idiot to try and stand in the way of it."

"The guy is smarter than he looks," Ruby replied with a smile and Snow shook her head and grinned.

"So I'm asking you. Will you join my family? Will you be with me?"

"Be with you or be with you and David?" Ruby asked quietly, not really wanting to know the answer.

"Just me," Snow smiled knowingly.

Ruby bit her bottom lip as she stifled a smile poorly and nodded her head.

"Yes?" Snow voiced with excitement.

"Yes!" Ruby replied with a wide grin and scooped up the shorter woman into her arms and twirled her around the room in her joy.

After several days of hiding out in the hillside cave system, Solari, who recovered the night she was brought in, led a team of youngling scouts to survey the wooded area around the Amazon village. Emma, ever vigilant, stood watch while they were gone and Regina assisted Magdalus with the wounded and helped with keeping the children preoccupied. It was a rough few days, many of the kids had nightmares, and most of the village hadn't slept but for a few hours.

Including Emma, despite Regina's insistent urgings. In all of her time as savior, she'd never had to take a life and every time she closed her eyes she saw the man she killed. He taunted her. So she just felt it better to avoid it in true Swan fashion.

Regina saddled up next to the Sheriff just outside the cave entrance and gently cleared her throat as not to startle the blonde who since the raid, had been on a razor's edge. Her Sheriff's blonde head snapped around, and red-rimmed green eyes met brown. "Hey," she said then went back to scanning the area.

"Hey," the Mayor replied in the absence of any real greeting. The Savior's appearance startled the brunette, and she was uncertain as to what to say to her. They stood in uncomfortable silence, well the Mayor did, the Sheriff didn't seem to notice. "So we should be able to go back into the village tonight, right?" Regina finally asked, deciding anywhere was a good place to start.

"Depends," Emma abruptly answered.

Before Regina could snap at the blonde, they heard a dove call in the trees which drew their
attention and several Amazon teens rappelled down from the canopy. Solari walked up to Emma and took her arm in greeting. "We are all clear. Thank you for your help, my friend," the brunette nodded in Regina's direction, suspicious of the shorter woman after an altercation a few days before regarding the security of the camp. In the end, Emma ended up removing Regina from the situation and as always talked her Queen down from the edge of an explosive temper tantrum. Both brunettes have avoided one another ever since.

Regina slid into the arms of her Sheriff and guided her back into the cave to assist in getting the children moved back down into the village. Emma allowed for the move, she wanted to tell the Mayor she had the wrong idea about their actual relationship, but it never seemed like the right time. The few days following the raid had been hectic and Emma was distracted.

Once the village was determined to be safe, the pair helped with the few adults to get the children set up and the village cleared out. After a long day of labor, the women brought dinner back to their temporary hut to eat. Emma was quiet and withdrawn, and it put Regina on edge. 

*This wasn't the girl she had gotten to know over the past week.*

They had gone their separate ways helping with the village repair, Emma assisting Solari and Regina assisted Magdalus with more of the mundane village work. The pair were given a new hut because even though the dead were removed from the village, the cleaning of the gore left over from the raid was an ongoing job. Emma worried over the last few days how she could stay, let alone sleep, in the hut where she had murdered that warrior and was extremely pleased when they were given new accommodations.

Unbeknownst to the blonde, it had been the Mayor who had requested the change covertly, cornering Magdalus during one of their rounds tending to the wounded. Regina remembered her first kill, and although it was under extremely different circumstances, it haunted even her. She could see the light in the blonde, a light that had never been as bright within herself and she knew this was a situation her apparent lover wouldn't get over easily.

The argument before lights out had been an ongoing thing between them, and Regina was putting her foot down this evening. There would be no watch for the blonde to tend to, no last minute thing that would pull her away from their bed. This was the night the Sheriff would get some proper sleep if it killed Regina.

She talked the blonde into getting into her nightshirt and ultimately agreed with the Sheriff's assessment that the woman needed to be ready at a moment's notice. By the time they started having that conversation, the drugs the Mayor slipped into the blonde's dinner had begun to take effect, and she was suddenly much more compliant to Regina's wishes.

Once the blonde was tucked in, she passed out as soon as her head hit the pillow. "Thank you, Maggie!" Regina whispered to the air. Their time together sharing trauma tips and medical expertise had formed a bond between the women. Maggie did not know Regina as "the Evil Queen" nor the "Mayor of Storybrooke," she was merely Regina.

She took the Mayor's advice, and the brunette found that not having to be continuously guarded or defensive with the woman made it easier to relate to her. She relished in the fact that the healer simply trusted her word when tending to the care of the woman's Amazonian sisters and although she had been slightly hesitant about giving the brunette the sleeping aid to help the Sheriff, she trusted the Mayor's reasoning completely.

She looked down at the sleeping blonde and pushed a stray strand of hair away from her still features. She admired the woman in ways she has been unable to thus far and considered how
similar their son took after the blonde. She wondered if they'd used a donor who had similar features to herself or if the boy would resemble her in the slightest. Emma made mention about how the boy's inquisitive nature reminded her of Regina, how when he gets sassy and rolls his eyes he resembles the Mayor. She wondered if they'd discussed having more children

Her eyes roamed down to appreciate the fit body of her partner, partner? Girlfriend? How exactly do we identify? In Storybrooke it wasn't legal for two persons of the same sex to legally marry, and she thought that as Mayor she should probably visit that ridiculous little law on the books when they returned home. Regina licked her lips and let herself take in every inch of the sheriff.

*She certainly is in good shape. Perhaps another child could be something we discuss...*

Regina got up and blew out the candles around the hut leaving the fireplace low to burn through the night. She got back in bed and curled up behind the Sheriff, wrapping her arm around the woman's body and held her tight.

*Yes, this feels... good...right... like we've done this, thousands of times before... in a life where I am happy... finally, with someone I love, who loves me and the family I've always wanted... she thought as she pulled herself closer to the sleeping blonde and settled in her contentment, drifting off to sleep herself.*

Regina was ripped from her sleep in the middle of the night. Her bed partner was thrashing and calling out for her. "Emma?" she questioned still partially asleep and not quite sure of what exactly was happening. The body next to her thrashed and cried out once more, and Regina wrapped her arms around the blonde's upper torso and whispered into her ear, "Emma.. you're dreaming..." The woman cried out again which made Regina shake her gently. She then remembered she had drugged the girl and with an irritated roll of her eyes she spoke up, loud and firm, "Emma! Wake up!"

The Sheriff bolted up panting hard in the bed taking the little brunette who was wrapped around her, with her. "Regina?" Emma called, breathing hard and looked around the room; her features shadowed but the light from the fireplace showed her wild, frightened look clearly to the brunette.

"I'm here Emma," Regina replied as she collected herself enough to soothe her blonde charge.

Emma turned to where the voice came from in the room and took the Mayor's cheeks in the palms of her hands and whispered, "Oh I thought I lost you!" and crashed her lips against the Mayor's in a fiery kiss that startled Regina and left her breathless when the blonde broke off the embrace. The Sheriff wrapped her arms around her and began to sob.

"Oh!" Regina cleared her throat and tried to control the dizzying spin of her senses. "No dear, you had a nightmare." She embraced the blonde in her arms and ran her hands over the woman's back in an attempt to soothe her.

"He... He... R'Gina.." Emma managed to get out around her sobs.

"I know darling. It's okay. You are safe." Regina stroked the soft blonde curls and coaxed the woman to lay back and cradled her. "It was just a bad dream," she soothed, and when she felt Emma grow heavy against her, she started to relax.

She felt empathy for the woman she barely knew but seemingly shared life with. Taking a life was never easy, but the first was always the worst. This was something Regina was familiar with and could help the blonde manage. The woman was strong. She could get past this, with Regina's love, support, and understanding.
Emma awoke the next morning still groggy from the night before. She realized quickly she was in bed and it was morning. She also had a bare arm wrapped around her midsection holding her firm. She looked over and caught a glimpse of messy brown hair framing peaceful features, and her heart ached at the sight. She tried to lift the woman's arm off of her, but the movement only made the Queen grab hold of her all the tighter.

Her head was pounding, and she was having a difficult time shaking the sleep away, and generally felt strange. The movement stirred the Mayor who asked with a grumbled voice, "How are you feeling this morning Miss Swan?"

"Weird," Emma answered honestly and tried to keep her eyes open.

"Maggie said you wouldn't feel any after effects, are you alright?"

"After effects?"

"I gave you a little something to help you sleep dear."

"You drugged me?" Emma exclaimed as the realization that she had been so easily taken out by the Mayor hit her. This isn't my Mayor; this is the woman before Henry! The Evil Mayor! The Evil Mayor drugged me!

"Hardly!" the brunette tried to deny but realized she all but fessed up to it and relented. "Well a little bit," she said with a small shrug.

"Regina! You can't just drug people!" Anger burned in the green eyes of the Sheriff and Regina got defensive. "You were going on your fifth night with no sleep Emma. I did what I needed to do to keep you safe."

Emma gapped at the brunette, uncertain as to what to say. The groggy feeling was pushed away by her adrenaline when a realization occurred to her. "Maggie gave you drugs? Did she know what you were doing with them?"

"She did, and yes," the brunette dismissed. Emma shook her head in disbelief and Regina continued her defense. "She agreed with my assessment that you were in desperate need of sleep darling and despite the little nightmare you slept peacefully through."

"Nightmare?" Emma latched onto the last thing the woman said as her mind tried to process the rest of it.

"You don't remember?"

Emma shook her head silently.

"I suppose you don't remember kissing me either?" The Mayor said with a slight smile.

"I WHAT?"

"It is perfectly fine Emma. I'm sure in your drugged state your body just did something that came naturally to us when you were frightened."

Emma shook her head. I need to tell her.

"Come now darling, lay back down it is barely dawn."
Emma complied, her mind still reeling over the fact that the Mayor had drugged her and she had kissed her and basically, *holy crap what is happening to my life right now.*

"I'm not happy you secretly drugged me, Regina," she murmured as she settled into the warm embrace of the mayor.

"I know darling, but next time I tell you that you need your rest perhaps you'll simply listen to me, hmm?" Regina said so sweetly Emma hadn't realized it wasn't an apology, nor was it a promise she would never do it again; however it was very much Regina Mills. That familiarity was enough to soothe the blonde, and she drifted back off to sleep with her Queen.
Chapter 29

Ares, god of war, paced the length of the strategy tent reserved for Cortese's council. His three pawns in his latest scheme to win back the heart and soul of his dark princess sat looking bewildered.

The one on the end exclaimed, "We must mount a defense against the attack my lord!" A dark, muscular hand waved him off.

The man on the other side darted his gaze between his two counterparts and shrugged his shoulders, "We can easily defend against the harlots my lord. We will kill them all!" he jeered, and Ares lifted his hand making a gripping motion to the air. At the same time, the man started to choke. "You will not lay a finger on my Warrior Princess you fool!"

The third man started to panic, "Is that what this is all about lord Ares?! Getting back your whore?!"

Ares slapped his free hand through the empty air, and the warlord flew against a wooden pillar that held up the tent and slumped to the floor. The first man wisely dropped to his knees and bowed down to the god of war. "It is not for us to question your infinite wisdom my lord, please! Please show us your benevolence and spare my dundering counterparts, they know not what they do!"

Ares let the vermin breathe after a moment and sighed at his coughing hacking gasps for breath. "Duran," the god snapped his fingers to the only of the three that had treated him as if he were the god he was. "My name is Olseph my lord."

"Whatever," Ares rolled his eyes. "Assemble your army. We will divide and surround the Amazons and crush them once and for all!"

Ares watched as the man nodded his understanding then added, "Have your men make it look good, oh and Duran, make sure her brat suffers."

"Yes my lord." Olseph helped his choking friend and bowed to the god before dragging his unconscious brother warlord out of the tent.

In a shimmering light, the goddess Athena appeared behind the god of war. Her auburn hair adorned in gold chains which matched the golden fleece of her cape. The highly polished shine of her golden armor gleamed even in the low light of the tent. The goddess asked in a monotone voice, her pristine blue eyes cold and lifeless, "What do you think you are doing brother?"

"This doesn't concern you, sister! Go back to the rock you are so fond of and kiss daddy's ass," the god of war dismissed with anger. His dark features grew colder, darker when the woman just stared at him.

As if she was forcing the will for passion, she sneered, "Doesn't concern me? You are about to wage war against my favored and the Amazon Nation! This betrayal of your family for the love of your mortal?"

"This doesn't concern you, sister! Go back to the rock you are so fond of and kiss daddy's ass," the god of war dismissed with anger. His dark features grew colder, darker when the woman just stared at him.

Ares turned and licked his lips and sneered right back at the woman whose feigned interest disappeared as quickly as it came, "Do you not have confidence in your bitches dear sister?"

"They will destroy your incompetent army, and you will come crawling back to Mount Olympus begging for forgiveness!" She goaded trying to hit him in his pride, something the god of war...
uniquely possessed amongst her siblings.

"Meh, I've been on the outs with the family before. I think I'll take my chances. I've got Xena exactly where I want her!" Ares' black eyes chilled, and a maniacal grin spread across his face.

"So be it, Ares," the goddess hissed and disappeared in a shimmering golden light.

During the planning stages, Xena divided their large combined army and efficiently sandwiched Cortese's soldiers between the Centaurs and the Amazons. She was of course on the front line leading the Centaurs with the son of their leader, Phantes. They cut through their opponent's ranks taking to Phantes' back, riding him like a steed. Her heart blazed, and her muscles reacted as she fought through the wall of silver and red, chopping through limbs and flesh and armor as if it were parchment and did so with a wide feral grin upon her face.

She loved the battle. She loved the strategy but the implementation of the hours of planning was indeed her favorite part. Perhaps not the death, but standing so close to her own mortality was invigorating. She realized quickly there were far too few of Cortese's men and surmised they had tried to divide and conquer as well.

She sneered, "Ares…" This had his stink all over it, and the god may be a deity and quite powerful, but he was not all knowing. The Amazon alliance with the Centaurs was probably a surprise and knowing Ares' new errand boy, Olseph; he most likely put the fodder in the front line to have his best warriors take up the rear. The Centaurs would have been the surprise coming from the west, virtually the opposite direction from what would have been reasonable. Part of the plan was to take the focus off of the Centaurs, as they were larger and difficult to maneuver, by allowing the scouts to focus on the incoming Amazon troops.

She flipped off of the Centaur Prince's back and landed in the middle of battle. Blue eyes searched waring bodies frantically looking for a particular blonde. They needed to turn the tide of the Amazons before they were squeezed in. A curly blonde warrior caught the brunette's attention and Xena sliced and maimed her way over to the woman who was deftly fighting off three larger men. They were losing simply because their vision was impaired.

Of all the things to take from Cortese's reign, you idiots had to keep the masks! Xena thought to herself.

"Ephiny! Where's Gabrielle?"

"I don't know!" the woman bellowed as she slid down taking out two of the men with mortal wounds to their thighs. Xena, after parrying two others, pierced the third warrior through the back of his neck with her sword.

"I had him Xena!" Ephiny huffed out of breath.

"Okay well, there are five more behind you. Turn the Amazons we are about to get flanked from the south! And if you see Gabrielle..."

Ephiny stood tall and looked to the southern horizon, and sure enough, an extensive line of masked warriors appeared from the tree line. She cupped her hands over her mouth and loudly signaled the change in tactic just in time for the women to regroup and stand a chance at defeating their foes.

Xena cackled and then threw her chakram into the line of men who were barrelling down on the battlefield. Her shrill battle cry rang out over the uproar of war. Metal clanging and screams of agony as warriors were sliced down on all sides. She reached and held her hand out to catch her
chakram only to let it fly once more against masked heads running toward her. The flying disc ricocheted between men leaving gory destruction in its wake. The brunette fought back the barrage of men who seemingly all wanted a chance to be the one to take down the infamous warrior princess. She internally rolled her eyes as each of them were cut down.

The thick stench of copper permeated the air of battle. Blood mixed with the loose dirt at their feet creating slippery macabre mud puddles. That was never something you get used to, and it always happened on the battlefield. The bloody soil saturated her leathers and made them stiff once all was said and done, and as a warlord, she would often wade into a nearby river or lake after the battle to make cleaning her gear easier. The water would always run red as soon as she waded in, the sight most gruesome and a loathsome reminder of the downside of war.

*The death.*

*On all sides.*

She felt she was fortunate not to lose any of her more valuable limbs, but she had come close a few times. Near the end of her warlording career, she figured it was merely a matter of time before she just wasn't fast enough or wasn't strong enough and she would lose her life.

*It doesn't need to be this way.* Her lover's voice softly reminded her from within her mind's eye. She fought, mostly with muscle memory, her body practically on autopilot, so much so that she was able to put down her attackers and still get lost in thoughts of her love. Gabrielle was right. They could leave this place, this horror, behind. She could put her very specific skill set to use in another land, a land without war. A land without a target on her back. What would land such as this even look like? What would she do?

She saw in the distance platinum blonde stained dark with blood and mud. Her heart instantly warmed. The girl was an efficient killer, not expending too much energy and striking her opponents down quickly using precise kill shots. Careful to cause the least amount of suffering possible. Slicing the tip of her sais into unarmored flesh, beneath the chin, the groin, the armpit. Quick and deadly.

Several warriors eyed the brunette and left their opponents to chase after the dream of killing Xena, and the warrior princess soon had her hands full once again. She lost sight of her lover in the mess and quickly battled the men back using her years of training to her advantage.

Once the men were dead, she noticed several of Cortese's men were ripping off their masks and running from their slaughter. She shouted out in victory raising her dripping sword in the air. Many of the Centaurs and Amazons alike joined her in cheer. It was nothing short of a roar all around her. With a wide smile, she soaked in her comrade's excited energy.

She looked back to celebrate with her lover and didn't see the girl in her last known location. Several Amazon's rushed passed her, and her heart caught as several huddled in the general area where she saw Gabrielle last. Xena ran towards the mass of Amazon's, trying and failing to hold back panic as a heavy weight dropped within her gut.

The husky sorrowful screech of her lover echoed out in the valley, "Xena!" and the brunette picked up the pace pushing her way through the crowd her eyes fell upon the bloodied Queen cradling a lifeless brunette in her arms. The warrior dropped to her knees and placed her fingers under the jawline of the fallen Amazon.

*Damn.*
"Xena, do something!" Pleading watery eyes looked to her love for the answers, and Xena simply shook her head and closed her eyes. "No!" the bard screamed out her agony.

The queen regent muscled her way through the growing crowd of women and gasped at the sight she saw. "Eponin!" She dropped to her knees in the muddy mess of the battlefield and grabbed at the lifeless brunette. "What happened!?" she demanded from anyone.

Fiery coffee brown eyes met watery emerald, and her Queen let out a strangled cry. "She saved me, I... I dropped my guard with a foolish parry, and she stepped in front of the blade meant for me," Gabrielle explained, tears leaving flesh toned lines in the dirt that was on her face. "She gave her life for me," the blonde looked up to her lover and her face crumpled in her agony.

The women collected their dead and set the funeral pyres along the edge of the nearby lake. Xena, as she has done a thousand times before, sang the funeral rites to carry the dead souls down to the underworld. She held her lover as the blonde cried her sorrow over losing not only a friend but many of her sisters.

Eponin was more than a guard, more than a warrior. She had been a friend. A sister. Gabrielle was overcome with the loss. She knew going in, that this war, like many others, would result in deaths and she was grateful it hadn't been her lover, but the loss struck cold within her. She has participated in far too many funeral pyres. She has stood over far too many dead friends and family. She was at her breaking point, and she knew it.

"Promise me, Xena. This is our last war."

"I promise my Queen. This is our last," the warrior princess vowed, tears streaking her own cheeks in the light of the fire.

"We tell the girls when we get back, no matter how far Regina has come, Emma said the Evil Queen knew magic, whoever is back in that village is going to be good enough," the bard announced to the stoic warrior to her side.

*Emma will fight it.* Xena thought to herself, and as if the Queen heard her thoughts she added, "Emma will get over it."
Chapter 30

It had been a week since the night of the raid by Cortese's men, and Emma finally came clean with the Mayor about their official relationship status. It went as well as one could ever expect. Meaning not well at all.

Regina slipped into the strong embrace of the woman she apparently loved. They were growing quite close, and the brunette was finally opening herself up to the possibility that her life was not the lonely shell her revenge had been, even after the blonde got up in arms about a little sleeping aid.

"It isn't like I put you under a sleeping curse!" the woman defended herself.

"That's..." Emma shook her head at the irony of the woman saying such a thing to Snow White's daughter, "not the point, Regina."

Regina snuggled up to the blonde and let her hands wander over soft flesh. "Darling this is where you get over yourself, and we kiss and makeup, is it not?" The flirtatious grin on the brunette made Emma's stomach bottom out and she told herself, this was it. She had to come clean with the woman.

Emma pulled the Mayor's hands away from her and steeled her resolve. "I need to tell you something. We're not..." Emma stalled out when she saw the confused look on the mayor's face. "We are not together, romantically."

Regina stepped back and deadpanned, "What?!"

Emma flinched at the unmasked hurt she heard in the Mayor's voice. "We never.."

Regina pulled her arms away from the woman and wrapped them around herself. Her entire world was crashing around her; she felt that cold shadow of betrayal as if it had never left her. "But y..you said... What about Henry?"

The boy. My son!

The pain of losing something she hadn't even known what it felt like to have was immeasurable. The longing, the longing for the family, the child, had been grim and it felt like it was being ripped away from her.

The lost look in those dark eyes broke the Savior's heart, "We do have a son together, we parent him together, but you and I, we are not together, like that."

Regina gasped as the reality of what the blonde was saying to her hit home, she folded her arms tighter and took up a defensive stance. "I see," the Mayor's icy response cut Emma deep. "When did we stop being a couple?"

Emma sighed and pushed down the feeling like she was going to vomit. "That's the thing, we were never a couple."

"Excuse me?" Emma took a step back as the fire in Regina's eyes honestly frightened her just a little. It was reminiscent of her first months in Storybrooke and out of a pure instinct for self-preservation she retreated to a safe distance. "If you know what's good for you Miss Swan, you will start explaining yourself immediately!" The brunette hissed in that venomous way only the Mayor
of Storybrooke could.

Emma nodded her head at the unspoken threat and began to lie through her teeth. "We are friends. I was pregnant. You wanted a baby. We… uh… raise him together, b-but…"

"But," the Mayor interrupted, "We are not together." Regina shook her head in disbelief. "No. I may not have my memories Miss Swan, but I know what I felt!" Emma tried to comfort the furious, confused Queen only to be shoved away in disgust. "No! You lied to me! You made me think… you… We... Don't you touch me so help me, Miss Swan!"

Emma held her hands up in surrender to the brunette. "I didn't lie to you about that Regina. I.. I do love you," Emma said sadly.

Regina swallowed thickly before erupting in a fit of rage shouting, "Get. Out!"

Emma fought back her tears and hung her head in defeat. She turned and left their cottage, and as she closed the door behind her, she heard the telltale sound of the Mayor's temper erupting from the back bedroom. Emma sat on the porch and hid her head in her arms.

Way to go Swan.

She knew telling the Mayor was the right decision, even if the woman wouldn't remember any of this in the long run. For the short term, it had been tearing at the Sheriff, every longing look, gentle caress or suggestive flirt. It ripped at her heart. It wasn't fair. I'm not even sure this was right! She thought to herself as she heard the crashing and expletives of the Mayor's rage come from within the wooden hut. The woman looked hurt.

Fuck. Emma rested the back of her head against the bark of their shared accommodations and let the tears flow freely.

As the Sheriff closed the door, Regina threw the closest thing she had toward the wooden entryway. The sturdy cup bounced off of the frame and clattered to the floor. That was decidedly unsatisfying! She seethed to herself, so she turned and ripped the sheets and coverings off of their shared bed and threw them across the room. Enjoying the effort, it took to forcibly remove the blankets she picked up a wooden chair and threw it against the fireplace. The wooden stool, unlike the cup, splintered against the stone face and Regina felt the rush that destruction has always given her. She lifted a leg and pulverized it against the stonework of the fireplace. It satisfied something deep within her to destroy. It calmed her. It always has.

As a child when mother's teachings had inflamed the brunette's temper, she would run to her room and destroy her furniture. She wanted something to feel her wrath. Feel her pain in the wake of her suffering. She has always been this way. Evil.

No wonder. The Sheriff could never love someone like me. She screamed out her frustration and pounded the wall until her knuckles bled.

She threw herself down onto the bare futon mattress and cried into her arms. She had actually convinced herself that someone had finally seen her. Looked past her outward bravado and loved the woman she was. She wept lonely tears of decades of solitude. The walls she put up around her were exhausting to keep erected, and during her time here with the blonde Sheriff she felt what it was to let them down, and the prospect of having to put them back up devastated her.

Love is weakness, Regina.
She pulled herself into a tight ball in the center of the bed, covered her head with her arms, her hands over her ears in an effort to push away her mother's vile voice. The sound of her insecurities has always been in Cora's sickly sweet tone coming to her aid always when she was at her lowest and this afternoon was no different.

You are a foolish girl Regina. You actually thought that girl could love you? You can see the light in those eyes, how could you delude yourself so thoroughly? She could never care for you! No one will ever care for you! Your own mother couldn't love you, you were born defective, and everyone can see it. They all know what an awful, hateful, evil woman you are!

Regina rocked herself as the woman who gave her life cackled at her weakness, and soon she fell into a restless sleep.

The all too familiar look on the Mayor's face when Emma closed the door, she had seen that seething look before. That was the Mayor she met when she first came to Storybrooke, and it honestly broke her heart seeing the distrust in those dark eyes once again. So she camped out on the front porch of their shared bungalow.

Regina didn't come out for the remainder of the day, and as the day turned into night, Emma realized the woman expected her just not to return. So she stayed. Keeping a vigil for her Queen. Late into the evening, and early into the morning, she wished her proverbial dog house had an actual dog house she could crawl into and sleep. She sat up all night and shivered and cried and wished her friend was there. Her Regina. She sucked back a sniffle as that thought made her cry even harder. If I get her back. When I get her back.

Several hours later the Mayor awoke to the darkened quarters, her eyes took a moment to adjust to the lightless room, and she shivered in the absence of a warm fire. It was dark outside and when she fumbled for the candle she knew was next to her bed her fingers came in contact with soft leather. She lit the candle and identified the leather object as her journal; whoever moved their belongings must have placed it by the bed. She never got passed the idealistic ramblings of the child she used to be. That pathetic fool.

Once she lit several more candles and got the fireplace going, with the help of what used to be the desk chair, she remade the bed and got under the covers. It was quite late, and the blonde had not returned.

She didn’t run off; you forcibly removed her.

Yes, but I assumed she would return!

Why would she return? There is nothing here for her.

Regina lifted her chin in the face of her own beratement and picked up the book and began to read. After several hours she learned about her seemingly botched escape, a drunken tryst with the blonde and being pushed aside for the favor of some brunette warrior. Her dark self-talked about how Emma confessed her love, that she hid her feelings away and what the blonde had said was the reason for her doing so.

"My future self is a fool. This woman so clearly cares for me, but yet I do not return her affections. She considers the risk too great to reveal herself to me. I have lived in the memory of Daniel, of what could have been, all of my adult life. I ache for her tenderness. Her warmth. Her devotion. I am not, in my current state, the woman Emma longs for. No matter how I seek attachment to her, she will not give me all that I desire. This simple act of defiance has actually caused my fondness
for her to grow. I respect that she feels it is a violation of the woman she loves, even as it pains me. She is a beautiful woman, the fact that my future-self has not conquered the girl just solidifies my belief that I have turned into an utter fool."

The Mayor closed the book and looked around the empty bedroom and felt the loss of the blonde more acutely than she had up until that point. She was alone. Again. As always, this loneliness is of her own making.

Early the next morning the door to the hut opened, and the brunette exited looking no worse for wear, the shock on her face at the state of the Sheriff was plainly seen but was quickly schooled to a cool mask of indifference. As she stalked away, Emma stretched her muscles and got to her feet and trotted after the seemingly still pissed-off Mayor.

She knew the brunette knew she was following behind her, but the silent treatment had always been a medium caliber bullet in the Mayor's arsenal, and Emma kept her distance. They walked to the healer's hut, and Emma stopped in her tracks when Regina entered the makeshift wounded ward.

Emma was hoping the brunette was going to the mess tent to get some breakfast as they had both missed dinner last night. Regina, because she hadn't come out and Emma because she didn't want to leave the Queen to her own devices. She contemplated going to go grab something but then thought about what had happened when the Evil Queen was left alone for but a mere moment and the blonde huffed and sat down on the dewy morning ground next to the hut's entrance.

There wasn't many wounded left to care for, and Regina was aware that Maggie was adequately capable of taking care of the few they did have by herself, but she was angry, irritated and confused and didn't want to be alone any longer. It hurt her that the blonde lied, or at very least omitted the facts and let her act as though they cared for one another. That had upset her, but more so when the woman never returned that night. It was the first time she has slept alone since her time in Storybrooke. So many lonely nights for years on end and if she was honest with herself, she enjoyed the feel of the blonde next to her at night, waking in her strong arms every morning. Not that was something they ever did! A ruse to get her to...

Magdalus came in from the back with a warm smile, "Regina! How are you feeling this morning?"

"I'm well Maggie thank you. I," the brunette hesitated, then finished with deflection, "What needs to be done this morning?"

"Well, child, you can sit and tell me what's wrong because well is not at all what you are dearheart." The older woman ushered the shorter brunette into the sitting area of her makeshift office.

"I. No. I'm fine. I came here to work."

"Oh, so this," The older woman waved her hand gently around the brunette's dark circles under her eyes and the deep scowl that was pulling the edges of her lips to Tartarus, "has nothing to do with your sweet little blonde Sheriff sleeping out on the porch of your hut last night?"

"Did she… Sleep there?" Regina felt a little bad about putting the girl out. She assumed she would return, eventually. She never dreamed the Sheriff would sleep on the ground in nothing more than a light shirt and a pair of Levi's that were entirely too tight for proper circulation.
"That is the buzz going around the village. Want to talk about it?"

The Mayor shook her head but dropped her gaze in contemplation.

"What did she do?"

"She lied to me about the nature of our relationship," the Mayor admitted, the bite of her anger and betrayal evident. This information perked the healer up, "Oh? How so?" She knew the blonde Sheriff worshiped the ground the little brunette walked on and was having difficulty understanding how or why the woman would lie to the girl.

"She let me think we were romantically involved!" The Mayor scoffed and folded her arms over herself. "I will not be made a fool!"

"I see," Maggie said with a contemplative scowl

"She informed me of the truth before. I wrote about it in my journal, how I threw myself at her and she resisted the temptation, but when I clearly made a false assumption she allowed me to… to…"

"Care for her in return?"

The Mayor snapped, "What?"

"Let me ask you this sweetheart, how did you feel about her when you thought you were involved?"

"I.. I.. I don't know," Regina answered.

"Want to try that again honey?"

Regina rolled her eyes and answered, "Fine. It was nice. I liked how she made me feel."

"And last night as she slept out in the cold, how did you feel?"

The Mayor defended herself against the thought of the blonde freezing in the middle of the night, "I didn't know she was out there! I was angry she hadn't returned!"

"Well in the few weeks you all been here, I think I've gotten to know that little blonde girl pretty well and what I know is that she lives and breathes for you. Maybe you two aren't romantically involved, but maybe you should be." Maggie winked at the brunette, and Regina's frown deepened into a contemplative scowl.

"Well, why aren't we?" Regina asked.

"You'll need to ask your Sheriff that dearheart, but what you should be thinking is the girl came clean with you and told you the truth, not that she lied to you. She could have lived in that sweet little happy bubble forever, and you would never have known the difference. Perhaps she told you because she didn't want to lead you on…"

Maggie had a fairly confident opinion on why the Sheriff would correct the little brunette, and it had everything to do with her own heartache, but the healer didn't feel it was her place to comment. "Whatever the reason, she told you because she is a stand-up girl." She held out her hand and covered Regina's forearm and gave the woman a comforting pat. "She's got quite the growing little fanbase going on amongst my sisters. I'm sure she won't be left out in the cold long."

Regina blanched at the thought of someone else wanting her Sheriff. Flirting with her Sheriff.
Kissing her Sheriff. Touching *her* Sheriff.

*Oh hell no!*
After an enlightening talk with Magdalus, Regina exited the healer's tent surprised to find Emma sitting on the ground, head resting on folded arms. She looked down at the blonde and the soft vicious whispers of her mother filtered through her mind.

*Love is a weakness, Regina!*

*Power is the only thing you can count on. It's the only thing that matters.*

When the Sheriff did not notice her presence, she clipped an irritated throat clear which seemingly startled the blonde from wherever she was. Red irritation circled the mossy green eyes, and Regina lifted an eyebrow in a silent question.

Emma, exhausted, both emotionally and physically surrendered and broke eye contact with the older woman. She got up off the ground and followed the brunette back to their cottage.

Emma called out when she realized where the woman was going and it was nowhere near the food she desperately needed, "Regina?" The Mayor stopped at the sound of her name but did not turn around to face the girl and Emma continued, "Can we get some food?"

"You may do what you like, you do not answer to me, nor I you." With that she continued on her way, Emma slowly trailing behind.

When they got back to their hut, Emma barely had the front door closed before the brunette whirled around on her. "Why didn't you come home last night?"

"What?"

"I don't believe my question was unclear, Miss Swan."

"I... you... Ki-kicked me out," Emma stumbled.

"But yet you didn't leave, did you?"

"No...?" Emma answered confused as to where the brunette was going.

"No. And you followed me to Maggie's this morning and sat outside like a god damned puppy!"

Emma's mouth dropped open, and she was at a loss for words. "I... I... I wanted to make sure you are alright."

Exasperated, the Mayor shouted, "I am not your responsibility!"

Emma shouted back, tired and drained she resorted to the woman who got under the Mayor's skin when she first came to Storybrooke, "Yes, you are! You are my friend! You are my son's mother! You bet your pampered ass you are my responsibility!"

The fire in the green eyes made the Mayor hesitate for just a second, long enough for Emma to pounce. "I didn't correct you about our relationship because it was really nice feeling close to you!" she bellowed, tears springing up from a back up well she hadn't known existed. "I was having a hard time, and it was really fucking awesome to feel like you cared!" Emma turned from the brunette whose fiery anger had been instantly doused by the blonde's admission.
"I… I don't know how to feel about you Emma," the Mayor admitted quietly.

"I know. That's why I told you because the way you look at me hurts because I know MY Regina doesn't feel that way."

The Mayor felt unease and was uncertain if she should offer comfort the way she wanted to. She wanted to allow herself to be wrapped up in firm, muscular arms. To feel the protection and safety she had come to know recently. She found herself surprised she cared her actions had harmed the woman, and she felt embarrassed about her behavior. The need to touch the blonde outweighed her own stubbornness, and she gently placed a hand on the Sheriff's shoulder and turned her back around to face her. The anguish she saw in that beautiful face startled her, and she was unable hold back any longer and forced herself into an embrace.

"I'm sorry, Miss Swan."

"Me too, Madam Mayor."

Several more days went by, and things between the Mayor and the Sheriff seemed to calm down. Emma brought in a cot like the one she had in their previous bungalow, but whenever she had nightmares, Regina insisted she climb into the bed with her. They didn't discuss it; it was just easier for both women to enjoy the closeness without any of the drama.

The Mayor recorded her musings in her journal along with things she had experienced over the last couple of weeks and Emma helped around the village. They both settled into a daily routine that felt positively domestic, despite themselves. They bickered, often, and Regina noticed how the blonde deftly navigated her as if she knew what she felt before she herself did.

They finally got to a topic that Emma honestly dreaded discussing, but Regina was insistent.

"How much longer are we going to be here Emma? How are we going to get home?"

Emma set down the wooden piece she was sanding and gave her full attention to her Queen. "You need to get better before we can go home."

"I am not gaining any more memories Miss Swan, how much better do I need to be? We need to get home to Henry," Regina said placing her hands on her hips.

"I know we do. Xena, remember I told you about her? Well before she left she made more antidote, I'm just waiting for her and Gabrielle to return so…" 

"Why do we need to wait?" the Mayor asked with a hint of irritation.

*So we go from not wanting the antidote to insisting upon it. Oh, Regina Mills…* Emma rolled her eyes to herself over the complicated woman.

"I don't know how to… administer it," Emma said carefully.

"It's a medicine, is it not? I am sure Maggie is more than qualified to," she added air quotes to the blonde's choice of wording, "administer it."

Emma considered it for a moment and honestly she hadn't thought about Maggie. She *was* a healer after all. "Do you trust her to do it?"

"Of course. What does it entail?"
Emma winced knowingly and answered, "It's a rudimentary IV."

"Oh," Regina replied quietly. She considered her options and the strength of her resolve to return to her child outweighed her fear.

"Yeah. I know. So I will understand if you want to wait until Xena gets back," Emma offered knowingly.

"Miss Swan. Our child needs us," she stated factually. "I refuse to sit for however long and worry about this when Maggie is perfectly capable."

Emma took a deep breath and nodded her agreement. "Okay. We will go talk to Maggie this afternoon and get it set up."

"Thank you," Regina said folding her arms over on herself. "I am not fond of needles," she offered and broke her gaze, unwilling to show her feelings in the face of those all-knowing green eyes.

Emma gave the Mayor a small smile. "I am well aware Madam Mayor." She reached out and rested her hand on the woman's upper arm. "I'm here. It will be okay."

Maggie agreed to administer the antidote and turned up in the early evening as promised. Emma was seemingly more nervous than the brunette was herself, and paced the length of their bedroom while Regina changed for bed.

The Mayor barked as she returned to the side of the bed, "Calm yourself Miss Swan! You are making a difficult situation worse with your fidgeting!"

"I'm sorry!" Emma exclaimed. She knew all too well how apprehensive the woman was feeling and the fact that she was holding it all in, put the blonde on edge. "I just know how hard this is for you. I hate that we have to do this again." Emma closed her eyes and took a deep breath, "Okay. Let's get it done, hmm?"

Regina hesitated before she climbed into the large bed. She rested her hand on the diary she became all too familiar with over the last several weeks then looked up and locked her gaze to the Savior's, "You haven't read this have you, Miss Swan?"

Emma shook her head, "No Madam Mayor. I wouldn't violate your privacy that way."

The brunette lifted the leather bound book and held it against her chest, "You said some things to me, that I wrote down in here." She avoided eye contact and turned from the Savior nervously. "About how you feel about me," she clarified quietly.

Emma was surprised into silence, and the Queen continued, "I made mention that I, the woman you know, the woman whom you share our son with, may not share your admiration."

Emma swallowed thickly but still did not comment. The dark head turned and spoke over her shoulder, "I just wanted you to know, that I agree with my former self's assessment, if I do not reciprocate your feelings, Miss Swan, I have indeed turned into a fool."

The brunette slid into the cool bed and let out a shuddering breath. "Alright. Let's get this over with," she announced with finality. Emma sat in stunned silence on the opposite side and held the Mayor's hand as Maggie carefully did what she could to make the procedure as painless as possible.
Emma couldn't help the outpour of her own emotions as she watched the brunette lose consciousness and Maggie reached out and put her hand on the weeping woman's shoulder. "We'll get her back child."

"I know. I also know how awful the needle thing is and how she just locked it down and did it so we can get back to Henry… Sh-she is the strongest woman I've ever met."

"She is indeed a survivor, dearheart," the healer agreed.
Chapter 32

Emma didn't dare sleep that night. She told herself that she wanted to watch the Mayor to make sure nothing went wrong, but in reality, the reasoning was far more selfish. She couldn't imagine waking with a nightmare and not having the brunette there to help her. She didn't feel strong enough to face the taunting warrior alone, so she simply stayed awake.

The night dragged on, and Emma reflected on her time with the Mayor and the roller coaster ride that was maneuvering their relationship. She remembered the differences between each of her friend's personas, how different they were from one another, but how they each had been a stepping stone to get to the next. Who would wake up tomorrow morning? She was uncertain what she would do if the woman awoke and was a mother without her child. If she didn't remember Emma, but an infant Henry to be suddenly separated from him.

Emma took a deep breath and reached out and put her hand on the older woman's resting on her abdomen. I will explain that the boy is no longer an infant and he is safe. Could I tell her I am his birth mother? God how the hell is she going to react to that?! That is literally every adoptive parent's worst nightmare! She won't believe me that's for damn sure.

Emma reached up and brushed a stray strand of dark chocolate away from her friend's very calm face.

I'll just make her believe.

Good plan Swan. Just force the issue. That always works with Regina Mills.

She rolled her eyes at herself.

Once the sun rose, she got up and started busying herself with cleaning up their shared bungalow. She fingered the leather bound book her friend took to writing in over the last month.

...I wrote down about how you feel about me… The Mayor's voice echoed in her mind.

God dammit. I only told her any of that because I thought she would forget! I didn't think she'd write that part down!

Emma picked up the book and put it on the ledge of the fireplace mantle. Deciding that if her Regina didn't wake up and she was forced to deal with Henry's frantic mom, she could still use the memoir of the last month or so to help the woman relax. However, if it was her Regina, well that book is going to be great kindling.

There is no way in dark fiery hell I am letting my Regina read that! I didn't come this far to have everything get fucked up because the Evil Queen has loose lips.

With the journal safely tucked away she returned to the busy work she filled her time with and waited for her charge to wake. She counted out the little black pawns and set them next to their respective playing pieces. Chess has always been one of her favorite games, a pastor taught her during one of the longer stays in the group home and she took to it quickly. She honed her skills by playing other kids and even herself on occasion. She always wanted her own chess set but never had the roots to warrant getting one.

One of the first pieces she carved was the black queen, back when Regina first woke up. She found a naturally dark wood, most likely exclusive to this world and had no idea what kind of wood it
was, but it was easy to shape and was abundant in the surrounding vicinity. The Mayor helped her choose the wood to carve the white pieces out of. The softer wood reminded her of a birch, and she figured if she could bring the pieces home she could varnish them to protect them from use.

The set was nearly done, she had three more pieces to shape. The makeshift sandpaper she got from the artesian Amazons had been adequate for tooling and refining the basic shapes, and she actually had learned quite a bit about woodworking from the women. Enough to keep her busy during times like these, when all she seemingly had was endless time and no internet.

Regina didn't come around until the early afternoon, and by that point, Emma already called for Magdalus and expressed her fervent concern over the fact the brunette had not roused. Even though each iteration the Queen slept longer and longer, this known fact did not lessen the blonde's full on panic.

Maggie talked the Savior off the ledge by informing her that the advance scouts had returned with news of the siege, it had been a success, and the warriors would be home in two days time.

Although this was good news, Emma insisted on pacing nervously, berating herself for succumbing to the Mayor's impatience. As if waiting for Xena would have caused the brunette to wake in an acceptable amount of time.

After some time, Magdalus retreated to fetch the blonde some food, realizing she was never going to counterbalance the woman's own demons, but she could, however, keep the woman fed. Emma knelt next to the bed and picked up her friend's cool hand, kissing the back of it she breathed in the woman's strength in order to hold herself together. Regina's hand squeezed the hand that held her, and pouty pink lips parted with a groan.

"R'gina?" Emma couldn't help the relief she felt, and she let out a strangled chuckle when long dark eyelashes fluttered open to reveal confused dark eyes.

"Emma? What's going on?"

"You know me?" Emma exclaimed with not only surprise but desperate jubilation.

"Of course I know you, you idiot."

Emma, in her utter elation, threw herself into a startling embrace of the Mayor and cried, "It's you!" A realization struck her when she felt the stiff movements of the woman within her embrace and asked carefully as she pulled away from the woman, "Wait, what was the last thing you remember?"

"That awful inn and your drunken idiocy," Regina answered with a scowl. "I have a significant headache," she offered as an afterthought.

"That's great!" Emma beamed a smile through her tears.

"It is actually quite awful, thank you. Where are we?" Regina looked around and noticed that they were not in the inn she distinctly remembered.

"Right. I'm sorry. Hang on." Emma got up and fetched her friend water then took out one of the many pouches of pain reliever Xena left for her.

She helped the Queen sit up and handed her a cup of the liquid-infused pain relief then sat down and stared happily. She caressed the older woman's hand as she held it tightly, almost as if she were afraid to let her go.
"Emma, you are acting oddly, and it is off-putting. Where are we?"

"Sorry. I'm just so happy!" Emma exclaimed with a sheepish grin. She hid the tears that formed and fell by taking the empty cup from the Mayor and refilled it with clean water. She took several breaths and wiped her eyes before she returned to the brunette. "We are in the Amazon village."

Regina exclaimed in astonishment, "What?! How?"

"We were attacked on the way here, and you got hit with a poison dart. We've been here over a month I think, maybe longer. You were in a coma or something because of the poison, but you are better now. Does anything other than your head hurt?" Emma decided to give her the cliff's notes version of events until Xena got back.

Regina slowly shook her head no and took in and processed the information.

They heard a knock at the door and then saw Maggie as she brought in a tray of goodies. Emma got up and ran to the older woman and greeted her with a giant bear hug. "She's back! It's her! She remembers!"

"Put me down dearheart," Maggie chuckled nervously. The girl was wiry, and it hid her strength. "You're likely to give this old girl a heart attack carrying on like that!" The healer sat on the bed next to Regina and tentatively checked her vitals. She had grown to know the feisty brunette in the last couple weeks as the Mayor of Storybrooke, and the older Amazon could tell the brunette didn't recognize her. The friendship they had was lost, and she suddenly gained a whole new first-hand understanding, and sincere sympathy, for what the blonde has been going through.

Maggie started to ask some questions, and Regina's short, abrupt answers seemed to state loud and clear she was uncomfortable and so the healer smiled then went back to Emma, "You see dearheart. Just a bit of faith. The gods are all powerful."

Emma chuckled and shook her head knowing that their ongoing faith versus science argument would never end. The fact that the healer's so-called gods were real, for all intents and purposes, sort of put Emma's argument on ice. The only thing she could say was that Regina had magic and she may look like a goddess, but she was in fact completely human and totally mortal. This seemingly always got a chuckle out of the older woman who would just shake her head with a knowing smile.

"She seemed nice," Regina commented when the healer left them alone once again. "Yeah, you got on with her pretty well," Emma informed with a smile. She took the brunette's hand and helped her sit up and out of bed.

"I... did? I thought I was in a coma?" Regina asked confused.

"You were then you took this medicine stuff Xena made, and it woke you up... But you didn't know you were you, and you didn't know I was me and it, well it sucked but you are better, and I'm really looking forward to getting the hell out of this realm," Emma said as she went over the brunette and checked her for pain.

The Sheriff fixed them both a plate of food and sat her friend down and told her the entire sorted story, mostly. Up to and including the attack on the village, where Xena and Gabrielle were waging war but left out major plotless information like secrets revealed and affections admitted.

She led the brunette up to the queen's bath and gave her the tour then left her alone to return to their bungalow. She started a large fire, so the hut was nice and warm for when the Queen returned, and
atop the burning logs she placed Regina's diary. She placed several more logs on top of the book just to make sure it went up completely and let out a sigh relief.

*This whole thing is over! We can go back to the way things were.*

Although Emma felt elated that her Regina was back, she felt apprehensive and unsure of herself. Over the last month or so she allowed herself to feel things openly with the Queen, and had found out things about her friend. There was an interest, perhaps not in her, but in women, which opened up options. The option was non-existent before this little trip because the Sheriff didn't know that the Mayor was bisexual. She wasn't sure if the fairy tale characters even had a term for bisexuality, or even gay or lesbian. They seemed like they simply discouraged it at every turn if Cora and Henry Mills was any indication.

The Evil Queen's insistence and even the Mayor's agreement meant nothing to the Sheriff. They didn't know the truth of who she was to the brunette. They didn't know the family history. The bad blood. If they had, things would have gone very differently Emma was sure of it.

No. *This was the best way to go about this. The book is gone, she won't remember, and everything will go back to how it was before.*

As hard as she thought she wanted that, that ease and familiarity that was her friendship with her son's mother, certain memories would crop back up without her permission. Like the way the Evil Queen looked at her sometimes or how the Mayor would hold her at night when she had a bad dream.

She, of course, didn't exactly *miss* the former iterations of her friend, but there was a closed-off stance about her Regina that she forgot existed. Her walls were much thicker and much taller than Emma remembered them being and it made her sad to see the woman readjust to her surroundings once again.

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Emma stood in a dark room, her sword drawn looking around herself fearfully. A white spotlight lit her form, and she heard slow shuffling in the darkness that surrounded her. She whipped herself around and sliced the blade into the shadows in hopes to deter whatever was out there from coming any closer.

Her child's disembodied voice echoed out in the dark around her, "Mom?!!"

"Henry?" She heard labored breathing coming from behind her, and she whipped around and sliced into the dark. Nothing made contact with her blade, and she felt her anxiety peak. The room was growing hot, and she could hear the distant sounds of swords clashing, and little girls screams.

"Emma!" The Mayor's frightened voice called in the distance, and her head instantly turned in that direction. A spotlight like the one above her head lit up in the distance, close enough she could see the brunette on the ground and the giant warrior on top of her.

"Regina!" Emma cried out and started to run towards her. Rows and rows of hands reached out from the dark to slow her pace, she chopped and sliced her way through to the brunette in distress. "I'm coming, Regina!"

"EMMA!" Regina called the blonde's name loudly and shook the thrashing woman in her cot. "You're having a nightmare, Swan!"

Emma came to and realized the arms that were grabbing her were, in fact, the Mayor's, and she stopped resisting.
Regina exclaimed, "What the hell was that about?" Her genuine concern for the blonde put a stop on any, and all tact.

Emma felt her cheeks grow bright red and she mumbled an apology and got up quickly and left the hut, leaving Regina kneeling on the floor, utterly confused.

Regina only sat there for but a moment before she got up and chased after the blonde into the night. To her surprise and relief, the woman hadn't gotten far and was sitting on the porch of their bungalow.

"Hey," Regina greeted as she sat down next to the visibly shaken Sheriff.

"I'm fine," Emma shook her head as if her own body disbelieved the lie she just uttered.

"Of course you are," Regina sat down next to the blonde careful not to make contact with the flighty Sheriff. "Want to talk about it?"

Emma hung her head down, so her long tangled hair covered her tear tracked face and shook her head an astounding no.

"I promise not to put it in my blackmail file on you," Regina offered.

"You have a blackmail file on me?" Emma looked up, startled, forgetting completely about the nightmare or her tear streaked face.

"No," Regina chuckled. "Not anymore," She amended with an eye-roll and grabbed the younger woman's chin to hold her gaze. "So, tell me."

"It's just a bad dream R'Gina. No big deal."

The Mayor let go of the Savior and Emma instantly missed the touch of the other woman.

"Okay, well in my experience it can help if you talk about it." Regina clasped her hands together around her own knees and reassured, "I won't force you, dear."

They sat in silence and Emma worked out in her own mind how she could even begin to tell the woman who sat next to her that their time in this realm had simply taken its toll on her and she was bowing under the stress. After what felt like a literal eternity Regina asked, "Why don't we go back to bed?"

Emma silently nodded her head and allowed the brunette to help her stand and led her back into the bungalow. Without thinking the blonde climbed into the large bed with the Mayor as she had done on numerous occasions and because it was dark she didn't see the brief questioning look the brunette flashed before she realized she was just too tired to care where the blonde slept.

Regina settled down, making sure to keep her distance knowing her friend shied away from physical touch, but was surprised when the woman wiggled closer and leaned into her. She assumed Emma was still shaken by her nightmare and rested a tentative hand on the bare shoulder of the Savior. She gently caressed the blonde with her soothing touches until she was lulled back to sleep.
As the scout report predicted, Xena and Gabrielle led the Amazons back the following evening, and Emma wanted to run out to greet them. Regina, citing a headache, decided to stay behind and rest.

Emma's features crinkled in worry when she asked, "A headache?" Each iteration of the antidote left the woman in pain, but each time it lasted less and less. She circled the woman and placed the back of her hand to the Queen's forehead, "Still?"

"It comes and goes. Go on, I'll be okay by myself for a little while dear," the politician smile Regina shot up did not quite make it to her eyes and Emma scowled knowing she was being placated.

"Okay, when we get home we'll get Whale to do a complete workup on you though, okay?" Regina nodded her agreement and sat down on the cushioned leather lounger in front of the fireplace. Emma pulled a small crocheted blanket off of the bed and wrapped it around the brunette. She placed a comforting hand on the dark crown of her friend's head and headed out to meet the incoming women.

As soon as the door to the hut closed behind the Sheriff a beautiful curly headed platinum blonde with a devious smile appeared next to the fireplace. Barely covered in a cotton candy pink chiffon two-piece nighty, she deviously smiled as she remained invisible to the lithe brunette.

"Poor little babe," the blonde commented and ran her fingers over the crown of the Mayor. Almost instantly the headache receded, and the brunette took a deep comforting breath and closed her eyes peacefully. The blonde returned to her spot next to the fireplace and waved her hands over the flames. A leather bound book materialized on the end table next to the resting brunette.

"Sorry babes, as the goddess of love, I just can't sit back and do nothing while you two dance around. Don't you mortal types understand the concept of mortality?" With a satisfied smirk, Aphrodite released a puff of pheromones to lead the brunette to the book then disappeared in a shimmering pink sparkle.

Regina turned her head and focused her attention on the soft brown leather of the book next to her. A nagging urgency forced her to pick up the heavy object, and she opened it to where she assumed the table of contents would typically be displayed. She was surprised when she saw the familiar script of her own writing staring back at her. She began to read, skimming over some parts, mindless ramblings from a girl the Mayor had long forgotten existed. She chuckled at the description of her friend in painstaking detail. She skipped further ahead and stopped at angry words thought only to herself so, so long ago she barely remembered thinking of such things. She stopped skimming as details of conversations were described, and thoughts so familiar to her were added as running commentary for conversations she had no active memory of.

She inspected her feet at the mention of her injury, and sure enough angry jagged pink lines crossed over her soles.

This happened. All of this... happened!

One line stuck out amongst the others, a gem of curiosity in a sea of chaos. "I am not, in my current state, the woman Emma longs for."
The woman Emma longs for? What the hell did that mean?

She continued to read in detail exactly what the author of the diary meant by that.

She thought over the thousands of interactions she had with the blonde over the years searching for anything that could support this claim. There had been a time, a time before Captain Guyliner, when the Mayor entertained the idea for the briefest of moments. She convinced herself that there was no way the Savior, the daughter of the idiots, her son's birth mother, the woman who broke her curse, would ever be interested in anything romantic with the Evil Queen. Then, Emma's relationship with the pirate had been a clear indication of her preferences. Yet here it was, in elegant black cursive on yellow parchment, clear as day. Clear written accounts of conversations about her friend's feelings. Conversations she believed happened.

Perhaps the Sheriff lied as a way to control me.

That is what people do. Love is a weakness; it gives others power over you.

Regina shook her head and pushed the words of her mother away with sheer will.

Not Emma Swan.

Yet she still believed it to be untrue. She honestly thought herself to be unlovable. Not only by the Savior but from anyone.

Her heart quickened as she considered how she could find out for certain; if she even wanted to know one way or another if it was true. Could she allow herself to be open in such a way to her son's mother? She remembered how the Sheriff felt in her bed, in her arms. Her warm body pressing into her, seeking comfort. Was it because the Queen was her only option? Perhaps...

She closed the book and stood, taking a look around their shared accommodations she began to pace. As she thought about how she genuinely felt for the Savior she started to feel a pang of hope that the woman could maybe, possibly, feel the same.

Emma's head perked up when she heard the all-clear call of doves from the night watch echo out into the forest. As the warriors exited the thick forest, Emma could see the women much more clearly. They all looked worse for wear even in the face of winning the war.

Emma's permanent smile faded when green eyes locked onto the Amazonian Queen's, and she asked, "What happened?"

"We need to talk," Gabrielle stated shortly and walked passed the taller blonde. Emma looked to Xena who nodded coaxing her to follow the shorter blonde. The bard lead the three of them towards the Queen's quarters in silence and Xena, noting the anxiety in the Sheriff, asked, "How is Regina?"

Emma put aside the strange behavior of the bard and beamed up at the warrior princess, "Maggie gave her the last dose, and she totally remembers everything! Well, practically everything. Like the inn and stuff, but not getting darted. I don't care. It is so much more than I ever could have hoped for!" The blonde stopped rambling then crashed into Xena, tears erupting suddenly. "Thank you! I mean it. I don't know what I would have done if I lost her."

"I know the feeling, Emma." Xena gave a tight smile and looked thoughtfully at her own Queen.

"Is she okay?" Emma asked quietly nodding to the bard's back.
"I'm afraid not," Xena said cryptically and coaxed the Sheriff to continue on their way. "We lost…
friends."

Emma swallowed hard and kicked herself for being happy about her own triumphs in the face of
the loss of battle. "Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's war," Xena simply said hiding her true feelings on the matter.

Once the trio entered Gabrielle's quarters, Emma noted the bard's tight features and deep scowl.
She sat on the nearby stool in the general living area and waited for the Queen to gather her
thoughts as she paced.

After several moments, Gabrielle stopped in front of Emma and crossed her arms and stared down
at the young blonde. She was not a tall woman, but the fact that she was a leader gave her height
beyond what was natural, and Emma felt very small in comparison. "We would like to come with
you," the bard stated plainly, deciding that directness was her best option.

"Okay," Emma replied then looked to Xena who was unpacking their gear. "Wait, to
Storybrooke?"

"Yes," the bard answered shortly.

"Really?" Emma smiled and Gabrielle noticeably relaxed. "Both of you, you and Xena. Xena and
Gabrielle want to come to Storybrooke?"

"Yes, Emma. I've decided that we can still do good in your world, and a world without war sounds
lovely."

"Well, we have war," Emma corrected, and the bard's face lost its light. "I mean,
over resource rights wage the war where I'm from," the blonde said carefully trying to explain it in
a way the bard would understand. "But we do have a unique situation in Storybrooke where none
of that really affects us, and the magical bad guys we get don't affect the outside world, so it is a
fair trade-off." Emma thought about that for a moment before scrunching up her nose and
shrugging her shoulders, "Sorta. But hey yeah I think it would be great if you guys came!"

Gabrielle looked back toward her warrior, and a silent conversation passed between them.
"Alright," the bard finally stated and looked back to the Sheriff. "I think we should go as soon as
possible. How is Regina?"

Emma couldn't help the wide grin on her face at the mention of the brunette, "She's back. She's
great. Everything is great."

"Good. I have already discussed our plans to Ephiny, and in three days time we will have the ritual
queening rites where I enact my right of cast and pass my crown onto the queen regent, then we
will have a celebration of the new Queen of the Amazons. After we have recovered, we will
attempt to contact Athena and go."

Emma said, excited to continue their adventure home, "Well hell, that sounds like a plan!"

Emma practically skipped her way through the village when she heard a heart-wrenching cry of
agony echo out from the mess tent. She took a detour and ducked her head in under the thick
canopy of the tent. A group of Amazon warriors huddled together, several of them crying, but the
one she knew drew her attention.
"Solari? What… Are you okay?"

The stocky brunette shook her head, and her face crumpled into her sorrow. She wrapped her arms around the blonde who had grown to become her friend and cried into the taller woman's shoulder.

"What happened?" Emma whispered as she comforted the brunette who answered one word that shattered Emma, "Eponin."

"What?" Emma could swear the buzz in her ears blocked out all sound around her except the weeping woman's words. Her heart felt like it was pumping too fast, and that was the thought that ran through her mind, *my blood pressure is too high.* She felt her throat close, and she couldn't breathe.

Solari let go of the blonde abruptly and unsheathed her sword, lifting it high above her head and yelled, "She died a true Amazon in service of our Queen!" The small group of women cheered through their tears and Emma's mind finally reacted to her lack of oxygen, and she fainted into the group of warriors.

Regina paced the length of her shared accommodations with the Sheriff, the very same Sheriff that clouded her mind and dominated her thoughts. She was angry. Angry because so much more than the few things the Savior mentioned happened while she was recovering. She pushed the hopeful feelings she initially felt aside and started to pick apart the blonde's motivators.

*Why wouldn't she tell me?*

Regina paced and tried to get her feelings under control because what she wanted to do was go and find the Sheriff and cold cock her then kiss her back awake. During her musings, she discovered the feeling she felt at the possibility that the Savior cared about her in more than a friend capacity gave her butterflies and images of raising Henry together as an actual family ran across her mind. Amongst other less pure thoughts, of course. She ached to feel that sense of belonging and that desire felt like weakness, which further confused and angered her.

The door to the front of their bungalow burst open which startled the Queen out of her internal thoughts. She rushed into the front greeting area to find two brunette warriors holding up either side of the Savior, who was looking worse for wear. The telltale signs of tears streaked the blonde's pale features, and without asking, Regina directed the women to the back bedroom where they deposited the blonde onto the bed.

One of the brunettes gave the Queen a silent nod, then with Regina's questioning look explained, "Our dear Sheriff here had an episode and lost consciousness."

Regina exasperated and rushed to the blonde's side, worry evident on her face, "She what?"

For the blonde's, part she was trying her best to hold it together in front of Solari, but as soon as the warrior women left the hut, she curled herself away and cried into the pillow.

"Em-ma, what happened?"

"Someone I cared about died. Her name was Eponin."

*Eponin? Why does that sound familiar?* The Queen wracked her muddied mind and remembered the question Gabrielle had asked her at the inn. Stark realization hit the brunette, and she exclaimed, "You cared for her?"
Emma nodded, "She was beautiful and strong and funny and… and now she's gone!" Sobs gripped the blonde once again, and she curled herself into a ball on the bed.

Regina's entire evening was filled with possibilities, what ifs and could be's. All of that crashed down around her as she watched her friend cry over this other woman. Jealousy reared its head for but a moment before Regina stuffed her own emotions back down. All of them. Jealousy, betrayal, hurt, embarrassment and of course her self-loathing.

_How could you even entertain the idea that the Savior could have real actual feelings for you?_

She pushed all of that aside and soothed her friend until the woman fell asleep. As soon as the blonde's deep breath presented itself, the brunette allowed her to feel the pain of losing the tentative grip on hope. Hope is a wicked thing, and Regina Mills knew better.

_Emma lied to control me! Of course she did! What a fool I truly am! That is why she didn't tell me everything because while she was wooing the Evil Queen with her lies, she was off getting close to this… warrior… this warrior who apparently had a type and Emma was it. The Savior fell for her… and now the woman was dead and how can you still hold resentment towards a dead woman?! You are an evil monster, Regina Mills!_

Old familiar feelings rushed back as if she were standing on that island once more, watching the woman she cared for suck face with the one handed moron. Instead of allowing the self-deprecating thoughts and jealousy to consume her, Regina isolated her feelings by systematically placing her walls back up. Walls that had been taken down by the Savior herself were now fortified and anew.
Chapter 34

The next day Regina's headache came back with a vengeance. She left the Savior to sleep and was about to go and find Xena when the woman herself knocked at her front door.

"Xena," the Mayor stated in her cool tone. She felt more comfortable resorting to her chilly political stance, the previous evening had taken its toll on the brunette, and she was doing all she could to hold herself together.

To the warrior princess's credit, she recognized the Mayor's defensive posture and decided not to push it. "Madam Mayor," azure chips danced over Regina, taking the woman in before deciding how to proceed.

"I was just coming to find you. Would you mind taking me to the healer's hut? I seem to have run out of the pain reliever."

"Of course. Is Emma up?"

"No dear she is upset about her little girlfriend, so I decided to allow her to sleep in," Regina replied curtly.

Xena's features did not show the confusion she felt at that statement, the only thing that gave her away, if the shorter brunette had a mind to notice, was the quick upturn of an eyebrow. Xena did not comment and decided instead, to usher the guarded brunette towards her chosen destination.

Upon arriving at the healer's hut, Xena was relieved to see that Magdalus was more than happy to fill up the vacuum of conversation between herself and the Mayor.

"Regina! It is so lovely to see you out and about!" The healer gushed, "Where is our dear Sheriff this morning?" she asked before Regina could get a word in edgewise.

Regina looked to Xena, who revealed nothing, of course, before answering, "From what I gathered," Regina started, not entirely comfortable discussing Emma's private affairs with the likes of this stranger, no matter how familiar the woman allowed herself to be. "One of the Amazons she was… courting… passed on…"

Maggie looked up at Xena who at this point shrugged with her ignorance.

Regina noticed the deafening silence between the two brunette's that looked at her expectantly and added, "That warrior, Eponin that Gabrielle set Emma up with?" she shook her head disturbed by the women's lack of recognition, "She… uh… was a casualty in the assault."

Xena finally showed the confusion she felt since picking up the brunette that morning, but it was Magdalus that spoke the sentiment aloud, "What are you talking about dearheart?"

Regina huffed her response and shook her head. Clearly, the Sheriff had not made the affair public knowledge no matter how friendly she seemed towards this healer. "Nothing. Just Emma is sleeping in. I am here for the pain reliever for my headaches." The brunette waved the women, and their inquiries off. She was not for idle gossip, certainly not about her friend.

Maggie looked back towards Xena expectantly who in turn put her hands up in surrender, and brown eyes met blue, and the warrior princess explained, "I am no longer meddling."
"Well, fortunately, I am not held to such a standard," the healer announced as she put together a few packets of herbs for the Queen to take with her. Xena silently shook her head and took a deep, exasperated breath. Maggie ignored the warrior and handed the packs over to the shorter brunette and held onto the woman's hands when she tried to take the offered items. "I understand that you have no recollection of our friendship Regina, but please hear me. I'm sure our Sheriff is upset about my sister Poni, they spent a great deal of time together, as nothing more than friends."

Maggie could see the dark woman's resistance to belief and added, "Emma has eyes for only one brunette," she looked poignantly at the Mayor, "and she is not any of my sisters."

Regina's mouth opened to ask a question but looked to the warrior princess for confirmation as the words spoken to her settled and became clear. Regina shook her head and snarked, "Right." The response was crisp and cool and screamed her personal truth. "If you are quite finished meddling dear, I must be on my way." The Mayor did not wait for a response and promptly left the healer's tent and marched back towards her shared accommodations with the Sheriff.

Xena shook her head and looked back to the healer and said, "The Queen has spoken."

"Yes well…" the healer worried her lip.

The taller brunette held her hands up and explained, "Gabby forbade me from interfering."

"Yes well, you are bound to her will in ways I am not."

Xena's smile silently crawled across her lips, and Magdalus rolled her eyes knowingly.

It took almost three weeks before the heroes caught a break in narrowing down a portal. With the amount of time Ruby Lucas spent out in the woods during her wolf time, she noticed there was sort of a magical electrical charge in the air that grew stronger towards ground zero and with some experimentation she realized when this phenomenon happened a portal opened within 30 minutes.

Other changes started happening on the edge of town as well, things that broke the laws of nature. Gravity wells where items would float or become stuck to the ground. There were areas of the woods where all of the color seemingly drained from the flora and when someone happened to walk into these "colorless" areas, their skin burned. Angry red blisters would arise on the skin, and as a result, David persuaded the council to limit access to the woods that surrounded the town.

Unfortunately, things slowly started to escalate with strange random weather patterns such as snow squalls in August and monsoon-like conditions shortly thereafter. These unusual patterns were isolated in a small area and were easily taped off by the sheriff's station. The damaged curse was causing havoc, and so the heroes decided they needed to act quickly to get their savior home.

Snow was pacing on Granny's front porch. She had just been to see the Dark One, and he had some news for her in light of the increasing urgency to have the Savior return to town. He informed her that Regina and Emma could, combine their magical power and open a portal. It would take much, if not all, of their reserves, but it could be accomplished. However, he explained he was uncertain the Queen was aware of this fact, and even if she were, they would need something to guide them towards the correct destination otherwise they would have no captain to steer the portal and could end up literally anywhere.

_Somewhere where magic didn't exist._

He enchanted a compass to allow them to travel back to Storybrooke. Once again he said there was no price for his assistance and Snow chose to take this stipulation as family helping family as
opposed to what the knot in her stomach was telling her which was, nothing is free from the Dark One.

Snow knew, well, hoped that Red would have no reason to use the bean to leave this realm in search of anything, that the woman's needs could be rightfully fulfilled by the brunette herself, but fear of losing this woman was strong. Especially since Red admitted she had plans to leave once before, and Snow was none the wiser.

"You are going to wear a rut into Granny's front porch," Red said with a smile as she closed the door behind her and then stopped the shorter brunette in her tracks. She gently brushed her knuckles over the shorter woman's temple as if she were pushing hair from the fair girl's face and then kissed her forehead. "Tell me what's wrong Princess?"

Snow instantly blushed at the wolf's chosen term of endearment. She didn't dislike it, per se, it just made her feel regal in a place she was unaccustomed to feeling her royal status.

"So? What happened?"

"We've got a way to help Emma get home."

"We've always had a way to help Emma get home. My bean remember?"

"Yeah," Snow moved from the warm embrace and worried her lip. "I didn't tell Rumpelstiltskin about the bean, and I guess he worked out another way to help them get home, so we don't need to use it."

The wolf looked confused, "That's good right?"

The Princess nodded.

"Why don't you look like this is good news?"

"It is. I mean, of course, it is. I just..." the Princess blushed with her admission. "What are you going to do with it?"

Ruby's green eyes studied the shorter brunette for a moment before asking, "Are you still worried I'll use it?"

The Princess nodded again lowering her gaze, shameful of her selfishness.

Ruby smirked, "I know you know I'm not going to. I have everything I want." The wolf pulled the smaller woman back into her and wrapped her arms around her. "Besides," she continued thoughtfully, "Who knows when it will come in handy?"

Snow stiffened in the wolf's arms as Widow Lucas climbed the stairs to her home and gruffly greeted them before entering her house.

Ruby whispered into Snow's ear, "She knows, I mean about us. I told her."

"I'm aware," Snow said with a chuckle. "She threatened to skewer me with a crossbow bolt if I hurt you."

"What?" Ruby exclaimed, "I'm sorry Snow! Granny is a little..."

"It's fine Red. I love that she loves you so much, but she is a little intimidating." Snow replied with a nervous smile, "I suppose it is a good thing I don't intend on hurting you."
"So you are okay with her knowing, I mean, about us?" It was Ruby's turn to worry her lip as she laid out a fear that has been haunting her for weeks. She didn't wish to be the Princess's secret. She wanted a proper relationship with the woman, even as unconventional as it ultimately was.

"Yes of course!" The brunette seemed to see the turmoil within her girlfriend and proceeded to adamantly put her mind at rest, "I am proud of what we have Red. What I do, or what we do is none of anyone's business."

"So I can like take you out on a date?" Ruby smiled wide when the older woman nodded and pulled her girlfriend into a kiss.

"Like out in the world. You are just okay with that?"

Snow nodded again and tried to continue with her kiss, but the younger woman continued, "I can like hold hands with you and everything? What about David?"

Snow pulled back finally realizing that the wolf had a hold of this line of questioning and wasn't going to let go of it. "David knows Red. You know that. What anyone else thinks or says is inconsequential."

"You are a princess though, a married princess. Doesn't what your subject's think matter?"

"We don't live like royals here Red, and even if we did, no. Not to me. Not to my husband. Does it bother you? What other people are going to say about this?" Snow worried her lip and pulled back from the green-eyed beauty, "Are you having second thoughts?"

"No," Ruby shook her head and pulled the woman back into her embrace.

Snow smirked and ran her hands up Ruby's long neck and cupped her cheek. "Okay good, because none of that matters to me."

The wolf asked quietly, "What about Emma?"

"What about her?"

"Well, what… I mean are you going to tell her?"

"Of course!"

"You're not worried about her freaking out?"

"Not at all. First, my daughter is many things, and open-minded is at the very top of the list. Second, she loves you Red and thinks of you as part of the family because you have been since before she was born. So less worrying and more kissing please."

Red smiled wide as she let go of some of her reservations and pressed her lips against the woman she loved. Being able to finally feel Snow in all of the ways she had only ever dreamed about was truly a dream come true for her and she was not about to let anyone get in the way of her happiness. Least of all, her fears.
Olseph The Terrible was leading what was left of his men south when what could only be described as a disturbance, was seen off on the horizon. He sent off two of his most trusted scouts to assess the risk to the remainder of his once grand army.

He was once again alone leading his men for the glory of Ares. His former brothers in arms had abandoned the cause citing a betrayal from the god of war.

*Ares was a god. We can not understand the reasons why they do what they do.*

The warrior's blind faith in the god of war has led him to much glory. This small sidestep that the warrior princess herself caused was just a minor bump in his grander plans. He would regroup and regain his former glory as the new Cortese.

Few knew what the man himself actually looked like and that was decades ago when anyone who had laid eyes upon the man. Chances are those men were no longer alive. War was a young man's sport; few ever reached the greying age in this line of work. He was nearly 30 cycles. Ancient for a warlord. His years have given him experience though, and that experience has taught him much in the ways of war and strategy. Not to mention he was a part of Xena's crew when she was cutting her teeth as the Destroyer of Nations. He knew what it took to gain the favor of the god of war which is how he rose to the ranks that he had.

His scouting party delivered a strange sack with strange writing and even stranger metal fasteners that seamlessly bound the bag together. Whatever this was it was important he could feel it. He instructed his men to make camp, and once his tent was set up, he set the strange pack on his cot.

Once he figured out how to unfasten the binding by running the small metal clasp over the zigzagged metal and cloth line he pulled out several strange parchments with writing from another language. Seemingly the same language as the tag on the front of the pack.

He removed a round golden piece with a red and white stick floating under the glass which seemed to move as he moved. There was brightly colored packages of sweet smelling food and very odd clothing much too small to be that of a man.

As he rifled through the sack, a shimmering light appeared in his peripheral vision, and the god of war showed himself.

"What do you have here Duran?" Ares asked, being particularly drawn to the round golden item emitting a strange godlike power from it.

"It fell from the sky, My Lord." He handed the god of war the bright white parchment with the elegant foreign script, "Can you read this?"

Ares snatched the paper from the man's hands and huffed, "Of course I can. I am a god."

Olseph lowered his head in respect. *Of course, he could read it! How stupid are you?*

"Em-ma," Ares sounded out the word on the front. He opened and pulled out the crisp white parchment seemingly made from plant material, from within the folded covering made of the same.

"My dearest Emma. I hope this finds you and Regina well," Ares read aloud to the warlord who looked on in amazement. "We've been trying to find a way for you to get home and Gold came up
with a way for you and Regina to make a portal by combining your magic. I am certain Regina has figured that part out, but in case she hasn't, Gold has enclosed the instructions on how to do it. You will need the compass as a way to lead you home. Please be careful, sweetheart. I have enclosed some warm clothes, and some rice krispie treats from Henry, he said to share with Regina. He is safe but misses his moms. We miss you terribly Emma and hope you are safe. We love you, sweetheart. Love, Mom and Dad."

Ares looked over the second piece of parchment covered in a completely different language than what the dictation was written. He, of course, could understand it but didn't read it aloud to the witless warrior who sat before him.

The warrior asked, "What is a rice krispie treat?" Ares pointed to the shiny blue foiled package. Olseph licked the outside of the pack and wrinkled up his face in disgust. "How is this considered in any way a treat?" The warrior threw it aside and picked up the round golden piece that had caught the god of war's attention back on Mount Olympus. He didn't know why it felt the way it did, nor did he understand why this Emma would need it or how she could use it. Was she a god? A god he had never heard of? That sounded impossible.

He made a motion to grab what he assumed was the compass from the warrior when the dark-haired man suddenly grew a backbone and pulled away from him.

Ares' features grew dangerous and dark, and he demanded, "Duran, I insist you hand that over to your god."

"My name is Olseph!"

"I prefer Duran. As your god, I command you to give that to me. It is of no use to you."

"Ah but that is where you are wrong Ares. You desire it. Its usefulness is limitless."

Ares features darkened, "I could rip your spine from your meat suit and lynch you with it, maggot."

Olseph swallowed thickly at the realization of what he had started and the consequences of his actions. "You are my god Ares. I have devoted my life to worship at your altar. I, of course, will give you anything you ask of me My Lord, but I ask in return, you consider a small request."

Now Ares was not known for his patience, nor was he a god that got prayed to in order to receive favors. Unlike his siblings, he was about action. He granted his blessing on one warlord over another, the decision depended on his mood quite frankly, and he often blessed a smaller army over a larger one for nothing more than the bloodshed. The weaker warlords would pray harder after a win of such importance to their careers, and unbeknownst to the vermin, their prayers and devotion powered Mount Olympus. It kept the gods without want, powerful and immortal.

"What do you want, Duran?" Ares smirked when he saw the man's jaw tighten.

"I want to be considered to be your warrior prince. Forget about Xena. I could…" The request was cut off by the deep condescending laughter of the god before him. "Please Lord Ares, I could be the new Destroyer of Nations!"

"You could never replace her!" he exclaimed losing all of the mirth he just held. "She is art. When she slays in my name…" the dark god sucked in a deep breath and smiled, digging deep dimples into his cheeks.

"What is it about her that makes you lose sight of what is right in front of you?"
Ares surprised at the man's outburst, asked with all seriousness, "Do you really think of yourself in such caliber as the warrior princess?"

"I was taught by her hand. I was shaped in her form. I am younger and faster, and most importantly, I want the job!"

Ares considered his options. *I could kill the insolent man, and as Zeus as my witness, this man will die by my hand.* If he did so now, he would need to train a new Cortese and finding this one was hard enough. The man was right there were few of this caliber willing to do his bidding at his whim without questioning his motives.

"I will take it under advisement Duran. Now give me that compass before I lose my patience and kill you."

It was more than Olseph could hope for, and he handed over the artifact and was thankful for his life.

Ares didn't know if he would need this information, he just knew that this magical signature was different than anything he had encountered before. Different was unique. Unique was power. He knew he didn't want this information to fall into any of the other god's hands, no, this was strictly for the god of war.

Blonde hair cascaded down over the delicate skin of her abdomen and she groaned when she felt the hot breath against her hip bone. Soft wet kisses sent shivers down her body as the Savior slowly made her way down to where the brunette needed her to be.

Finally, after all this time, the heat this woman stirred in her was coming to fruition. She wanted to see the woman's face as she explored her body, she wanted to see the desire in those green eyes, to know that she felt the same as the Mayor did, but she couldn't release the tight grasp her fingers had on the bed sheets beneath them. All she could see was messy blonde curls, but she could feel everything the Savior was doing to her. Every kiss, every nip, every touch.

Her body jerked when Emma's breath caressed her most intimate of places and when a hot tongue darted out, she groaned the woman's name deep from within her chest. Arching her back up off the bed as the Savior plunged into her, her toes curling, her body shaking with desire, she needed this. She needed this bad.

The Mayor was ripped from her enjoyable dream by angry, frightened shouts from the Savior across the room. Emma's thrashing or scared whimpers have awoken Regina almost nightly and every time the blonde refused to discuss it.

She squinted as the sun poured into the hut from the window on the other side of the room and she guessed it was around time to wake up anyway. She was extremely aroused and remembered every detail of her dream with painful clarity. Unfortunately, the Savior did not sound like she was having as good a dream as Regina was, and so she dutifully got up to rouse the blonde.

Emma was crying, and Regina assumed these nightmares the savior had were about the deaths she caused during the attack on the village. She's read in detail about what had happened as her poisoned-self kept intricate notes on the goings on in her diary.

"Emma wake up dear. You are safe." Regina held the woman's strong arms down, avoiding the thrashing the Sheriff had been known to do during these violent episodes. She knelt on the floor next to the cot, the cot the Sheriff insisted she used even though Regina offered up the bed to her.
Regina chalked it up to her intimacy issues but silently wondered how the warrior Eponin had broken down the Savior's walls so easily.

*Perhaps it isn't Emma. Perhaps it's just me.*

Pushing such deprecating thoughts from her mind, Regina noticed the woman stopped struggling, and thick tears fell from under her eyelids. "Hey Swan, you're okay," the Mayor said in a hushed tone as she wiped the warm tears away from the woman's blushing cheeks.

"I'm sorry," Emma mumbled but didn't look up to meet the gaze of the Queen.

"For what dear?" Regina's hands rubbed up and down the Savior's arms as a way to comfort her, but the soft caresses were doing nothing to squash the Queen's libido.

"I don't know why I keep having these stupid nightmares. I'm sorry I keep waking you up. I can see if I can move to another hut if you want?"

"What? No!" Regina was startled and refused the blonde's offer much harsher than she initially intended. She softened her features when she saw the alarmed look on her friend's face, and she tried to calm her fast beating heart. She took a deep breath and sat back on her heels next to the Savior's cot. "I don't wish for you to get your own room, Emma," her dark eyes flicked up to gauge the woman's mood before continuing. She guessed she was beating herself up over this and it was spilling out into other areas, like blaming herself for the Queen's sleepless nights.

"You know it will help if you talk about it."

"They are just stupid nightmares, Regina. Nothing to talk about."

"Not the nightmares Miss Swan," Regina huffed then decided to help her friend by sharing something of herself. She brushed a few stray hairs away from the Savior's face and began, "When Rumpel first took me as an apprentice I was quite young. I was barely in my twenties; my innocence was still intact. That innocence was a problem for the Dark One's plan for me. I started learning magic to search for a way to bring back the love of my life."

"Daniel?" Emma asked knowingly. Regina nodded with a sad smile.

"I thought the Dark One could teach me how to revive him. He, of course, had his own agenda and needed me, broken. I hadn't known it at the time, but I played into his well-crafted scheme with staggering ease, and it was then I took my first heart." The older woman schooled the pain she felt at the memory and continued, "The woman was a stranger to me, all I knew was she was his new apprentice and was in my way, so I took her heart and crushed it."

Emma winced at the imagery that instantly brought to mind and asked, "Why are you telling me this Regina?"

"Even though I had my reasons for murdering that woman, she was the first that died by my hand. My actual hand. The events that pushed me to that point did not change the fact that it affected me, that kill. Even the darkness that surrounded the path I was walking down couldn't shield me from the moral agony of my first." Regina took a breath and then looked up to meet Emma's green questioning eyes, "Your first was much nobler. Those men came to this village to rape and kill little girls Emma. By ending that man's life, you saved countless people, including myself." She put her hand on the blonde's shoulder, "I know you, Swan, you are seeing him as a person, you are beating yourself up for ending his life with no debate. You can't hold this up to our world's moral standard, Swan. You can't."
The Savior's watery green eyes brimmed, "I know he would have hurt you Regina, and I feel awful about feeling bad about killing him."

"You need to forgive yourself, Emma."

"I should never have left you alone. I'm sorry!" The fear from that night gripped the Sheriff, and thick tears coated her cheeks at the memories of almost losing this woman yet again.

Regina gently caressed her friend's crown and soothed, "No matter the circumstances, you need to forgive yourself, Swan."

The deep rumble of the Mayor's voice touched Emma, and she started to feel a little more in control of herself. "I'll try." The blonde sniffled and wiped the tears away from her cheeks, "Did... Did Maggie tell you about the raid?"

Regina shook her head, "No, I read about it in my diary."

All of the color drained from the Savior's face, and she sat up on her elbows and stared at the brunette with proper fear held in her face. "You what?"

"Don't be mad," Regina felt the nervous tension off of the Sheriff and wondered if the woman knew anything about the diary her poisoned self-kept.

"What diary?" Emma croaked.

"Apparently when I was sick, I had a diary I kept and wrote just a few things in about the village and what I thought about what was going on around me." Regina added as the Sheriff got up with a jolt and went over to the fireplace, "It's fine Emma."

The blonde exclaimed, "It's gone, Regina!" She ran her hands over the top of the mantle as if her eyes deceived her and her fingers would find the leather bound book she was certain she burned.

"What's gone?"

"Your diary!" Emma raised her voice with the confusion she felt.

The Mayor stood and took the book from under her pillow, "No, it isn't." She noticed the sheer panic in Emma's eyes as she handed the book over to her and asked, "Whatever is the matter with you?" the Queen demanded.

Emma exclaimed in her shock, "I... I burned that book, Regina!"

"You what?" The Mayor asked confused, "Why?"

The panic receded, and a hard blush crept up the Savior's cheeks, and her eyes betrayed her with the look of guilt they held. "I... I didn't want you to read that."

"Why the hell not?" the Mayor demanded, confusion started to burn into anger the more the blonde explained.

"There's stuff in there, private stuff in there," the Sheriff admitted halfheartedly, desperately searching for a plausible reason to excuse the destruction of the woman's property by her hand.

"So let me get this straight. You invaded my privacy and read my diary, Emma? Then made a decision about my life without bothering to take my thoughts or feelings into consideration and made the executive decision to burn the evidence? Why?"
Anger dripped off of the question all but shouted at the Sheriff. "Do you trust me so little? Or is it that you didn't want me to find out how you lied to me to keep my poisoned self in line?" Regina completely lost all of her composure with the idea that this woman, her friend didn't find her trustworthy, and it was as if kerosene was poured on the fire of her anger.

The idea that Emma Swan was just like everyone else in her life, not trusting her, not talking to her about things that affect only Regina and forced her into situations that were beyond the control of the Queen. "I thought you understood Emma! But no! You're just like them! Trying to control me with… with your deception!" Thick tears welled up in the brown eyes of the Mayor, and she ripped the book away from the Savior's stunned grasp and marched out of their hut.

Emma Swan stood in the silence of the Amazonian bungalow for several moments after the wooden door slammed shut, punctuating the anger from her son's mother. Her mind reeled at everything that just poured out of the angry brunette, and she was having difficulty following her friend's train of thought.

Thought I understood what? Was she upset because she thought I read the book or because I got rid of it?

Of course, she was upset you burned her book!

Fuck she is SO pissed I lied to the mayor-her about being in a relationship? When the fuck did she read that stupid fucking book? Does she know how I feel about her? She must know.

Of course, she knows.

Fuck. This is it. This is the end of my friendship with her. Fuck. How am I going to fix this?

You can't. That's why she left.

She grabbed her jacket and slid her jeans on over the night shift she slept in and headed out the door herself, not so much in search of the Mayor, but made a beeline straight towards the bard's shared hut with Xena.

She knocked on the door tentatively at first then a little more forcefully when no one answered. The warrior princess ripped open the small wooden door with bed head and a scowl.

She heard the bard groan out from the bedroom in a sleepy voice, "Someone better be dead."

"Oh god! I'm sorry!" Emma exclaimed realizing her mistake far too late and let the frustrated tears she felt fall, she turned away from the warrior and retreated. Xena grabbed the scruff of her leather jacket and yanked the girl back forcefully, "By Zeus! Get in here Swan." Xena said in a gruff, "What the hell happened now?"

"I fucked up," she couldn't hold back the sob that escaped and covered her face in her embarrassment. "I'm sorry I didn't think about how early it is!" She rolled her eyes when she realized how often she came to the couple about her relationship, or rather non-relationship, with her son's mother.

After today it won't even be a friendship. Will she stop Henry from seeing me? Emma cried harder when the thought of her losing her entire family in one swift move hit her.

Gabrielle wrapped a robe around her naked form and joined her warrior and the Sheriff in the living area of her hut. She patted Xena's arm and gave the warrior an out with one word she knew the
other woman would appreciate, "Tea." The bard sat down next to the Sheriff and gently asked, "What do you think you did?"

"It's impossible! I burned that diary!" Emma started at the part that was the most complex to understand, even if it were directly in the middle of the story, "There is no way that I imagined it or dreamed it, I did it! I know I burned the right one!"

"Regina's diary?" The bard asked trying to remind Emma this was a conversation and not to allow her to spin out into a ranting dialogue as she was apt to do on occasion.

Emma nodded.

"Why would you do that?"

"There was stuff in there about stuff I didn't want my Regina to know about so I figured she wouldn't miss it because she wouldn't remember it, so I burned the damn thing! How the actual fuck did I not burn it? I saw it go up!" The Savior's confused watery eyes looked up to the bard, "It wasn't even singed! How the fuck did she get it?"

"Sounds like the gods to me," Xena said as she brought both blondes a steaming hot cup of tea. "They are always meddling in shit that doesn't concern them," she clarified with a hint of annoyance.

"God dammit!" Emma exclaimed as the realization hit her. "Now she not only knows what I was trying to keep from her but she knows I was trying to keep it from her!" Emma stood up and paced, proper panic and fear striped across her face. "How do I fix this?!" she stopped and looked into Gabrielle's caring eyes, "I need to fix this!"

Gabrielle took a sip of her tea and cleared her throat, "Tell me exactly what happened. From the beginning Emma."
Regina marched away from the wooden hut she shared with the infuriating blonde sheriff.

She is just like her idiot mother! She is always making decisions about my life without regard or concern for me! The look on her face said it all! She knew burning the book was wrong, but she tried to do it anyway! She must have gotten Charming's simpleton genes and burned the wrong book! How dare she!? Who the hell does she think she is?! All so I wouldn't find out about her little lie? As if I would be angry at her for lying about her feelings for me!

No, not angry, but disappointed in her, yes…

Disappointed that they were lies.

A lie she tried to cover up! Is caring for me so shameful? That she would go through such lengths to get rid of its mere suggestion?

Regina rolled her eyes at her inner dialogue and continued to berate herself for letting other people put ideas in her head when she knew the truth. She knew, under no uncertain terms, what the savior did not, could not, feel for her.

She stopped and rested her hands against a wooden fence that surrounded the training yard and hung her head in defeat.

This is so messy! She doesn't trust me. After all we've been through! I thought she was my friend…

The queen startled when a warm hand touched her ever cooling shoulder. She hadn't realized she left the cottage in nothing but a thin cotton nightgown and she was yanked back into the present, which included the chilly morning air.

"Are you okay dearheart?"

Regina rolled her eyes before turning to face the dark amazon healer. "I am quite alright," she replied forcefully, not entirely believing her own words as they left her mouth. "I am in no need of your meddling this morning dear," she added with contempt.

"Regina, I..." Magdalus could see that the dark woman was in turmoil, and her heart ached for the woman she'd gotten to know, but also knew if any of the mayor she knew were still left in this woman, she would not be forthright with detailed information regarding what was troubling her.

"No, I must get back, I hadn't realized how cool the mornings here truly are," Regina waved the woman off and spun around trying to get her bearings on where she was in relation to where she needed to be.

"No, come to my home, I'll make you some tea and get you in something warm. I promise very little meddling," the woman said with a warm smile.

Against her better judgment, and really only because she wasn't sure which direction she came from, Regina agreed and followed the older woman the short distance to the healer's home.

She sat down on the leather-covered rocking chair in the seating room and was instantly covered
with a thick blanket by her host. The healer threw an extra log onto the fire and put on a tea kettle to boil.

Maggie asked with a smirk, "So what did she do this time?"

"I believe I was promised no meddling dear," Regina replied mirthlessly through chattering teeth as her chilled body started to warm.

"I believe I said, very little meddling," the healer smiled warmly. "You are out in the middle of the village in your nightwear at the crack of dawn. That reeks of Emma Swan."

"She lied to me."

"Again?" The healer's features pulled tight when she remembered the woman had no memory of the time before and she shook her head, "So do you remember?"

Regina shook her head no but explained in detail what she meant. She went over the do-gooding Charming bloodline and the fact that the sheriff had the unfortunate circumstance to be cursed with both Snow and Charming's idiot genes. Once she started the beratement of the sheriff, it seemed she couldn't stop, and she included, much to her surprise and consequential dismay, her own thoughts and feelings about the situation she found herself in. Up to and including the sheriff's nightmares and her own flights of fancy. The floodgate was pried open, and as uncharacteristic it was for the mayor to open up to anyone, it was even more so to trust a virtual stranger with confidential information such as her personal feelings. Yet, here she was, with this soft-spoken Amazon, pouring out her heart. She felt a familiar wave of kinship with the woman which settled her growing anxiety about exposing herself in such a raw way.

Maggie listened to the woman, some of what she said, the healer had heard before, but she didn't dare stop her from telling her story for fear the brunette would clam up and stop. It was healthy for the brunette to get what she was feeling off of her chest and if she couldn't talk to her little blonde sheriff, Maggie was pleased the woman could come to her. She hoped the brunette had regained some of her memories from the last couple of lunar cycles, but it seemed as though the healer would need to rebuild their relationship from scratch.

She liked Regina and felt the woman was worth the effort. She put the sentiment out there and told the mayor in not so many words how exactly she felt about her and their situation.

She also tried to set the brunette straight on the sheriff's motivations, although she wasn't exactly clear on why the blonde would burn the mayor's diary. Regina knew Emma best, so she decided to ask her thoughts on the matter.

"So why do you think she burned the book?"

Regina sipped her tea and gently rocked as she contemplated her answer. "I think she is embarrassed that she lied to me about her feelings in order to control my poisoned self. I'm not judging her for it. I assume it was warranted. I think she feels bad she violated my privacy and went through my diary and when she saw how my imbecilic-self fawned over her, she decided to burn the evidence of her deception."

Maggie swallowed thickly; she hadn't expected that honestly, and so she nodded and pondered how to correct the brunette's thinking. "What if..." Maggie started not making eye contact with the surly brunette. "She didn't violate your privacy. What if the last iteration of your ill-self told her what was in there."
"You sound like you are stating a factual statement and not a hypothetical," Regina replied peering at the woman carefully.

"I did overhear you tell the sheriff intimate details of what was written in your diary, dearheart."

"Fine, perhaps she didn't violate my privacy, she still tried to hide her lies in a burning inferno!" Anger flashed in the mayor's dark eyes, and the healer recognized the danger and backed down.

"Fair enough," Maggie replied and got up to refill their teacups. As she stoked the fire in the hearth, she asked a question nonchalantly. "If she lied to your ill-persona, why would she care if you, her friend, found out about it? I mean, she cared enough to burn all of your experiences since you've been here, not just the one instance of apparent untruth?"

The queen's eyelashes fluttered as she tried to consider what the sheriff's motives were and decided on a simple stock answer, "She's an idiot."

Maggie chuckled as she refilled the queen's cup with fresh tea and agreed, "Perhaps."

"Why don't you just say whatever it is you are thinking darling, you are giving me a headache beating around the bush." Regina rubbed her temple to prove her point.

"Do you really want to know what I think?"

"Not particularly, but that hasn't stopped you from expressing your opinion before, has it dear?"

Maggie chuckled as she bowed to the woman's fortitude. "Fair enough." She cleared her throat and sat back and got comfortable. "I think the sheriff is in love with you and burned your book because she told your ill-persona the truth, thinking you would forget and hadn't realized you would immortalize said truth in your diary. I think she panicked when you informed her of that fact and she burned the book because she believes you couldn't possibly feel the same for her. I think your friendship means everything to her and she would rather have you in a platonic capacity than not have you at all." Maggie shrugged at herself and took a deep breath in relief.

All the good feelings the healer was feeling went out the window when the mayor burst out laughing. To the average person, the mayor would look like she was sincerely amused at the healer's wild guesswork, but Magdalus had spent a significant amount of time with the mayor and could see the terror in the woman's dark eyes.

"You don't think she could love you do you?" Maggie asked a little astonished, and when the mayor instantly stopped laughing, she knew she was right.

"I think that is quite enough meddling for today, dear," Regina stated and made a motion to get up and leave the healer's residence.

"Why do you think that book turned up unscathed?" Maggie asked quickly trying to come at the issue a new way.

Regina stood and began to fold the blanket she was using. "The sheriff burned the wrong book. What other explanation is there?"

"The gods interfere with mortals all the time. The question I would be asking if I were you is why? Why would a god take the time out of their immortality to resurrect a burnt diary?"

Regina rolled her eyes; she was finished with this asinine line of thought. "I don't think your gods had anything to do with it. I think Emma is an idiot, not that it is her fault, her parents are idiots,
and I just thank my lucky stars the idiot gene skipped a generation because my son is brilliant." She side glanced the healer who held the mirth she felt in her kind eyes. The mayor rolled her eyes and tried to straighten out the Amazon, so she would never have this conversation ever again.

"You think she cares for me because you do not know me. You do not know our past," she placed the folded blanket on the chair and began tidying up the tea mess, but continued to explain. "I killed her grandfather, I hunted her mother for years and tried to kill her on more than one occasion, I cast a dastardly curse that ripped her from her loving parents and forced her to grow up alone and unloved and when I met her I tried to curse her and ended up killing our son. She is the savior. She saved our son from the brink of death, she saved the kingdom from the evil queen," she pointed to herself angrily, "she broke my curse. She is a hero, and I am the villain." The queen's eyes welled up with tears as she spoke, but she willed those tears not to fall. "No Maggie, I'm sorry, but you are simply wrong. She could never care for me. Evidently not even as a friend." She clenched her jaw muscles and held tight to her emotions; she would not cry in front of this woman.

Maggie did know these things, well some of them anyway and that did not deter her from her opinion. She could see the fear had not left the dark eyes of the mayor, so she relented, once more. "I respect you Regina enough to no longer argue my belief." She peered at the woman standing tall and proud in the middle of her greeting room and continued, "I do, however, disagree with you, because I did know those things about you, some of which you told me, others the sheriff herself did. I have spent time with the both of you, I have grown to care about both of you. I believe that you each are broken in the same exact way, neither of you believe you are worthy of the other's heart. However I have said my peace, I will not meddle with you any further. The choice is yours, your majesty."

"Yes, it is," Regina replied raising her chin in defiance. The healer's words struck home with the queen and even if she wasn't quite ready to buy into any kind of future with the savior as anything more than a co-parent or at best a friend, she did admit that perhaps the Amazon made some valid points she would need to consider. Later. When her mind wasn't spinning like a top.

The healer asked off subject in an attempt to persuade the mayor to stay a little longer, "How are your headaches dearheart?" She didn't want to leave the woman alone with her own self-destructive thoughts and perhaps if they spoke on something more pleasant her words would sink into the thick skull of the mayor.

Regina spent the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon in the company of Magdalus, much to the healer's delight. It was a chance to reacquaint herself with the mayor, and although the woman was much the same, she was also extremely different in many ways. They spent the time renewing their friendship and, as promised, did not revisit the subject of the sheriff's secret affections.
Chapter 37

Gabrielle sat on the love seat with the head of a sleeping Sheriff in her lap. The woman broke down after their discussion and ended up using the bard as a pillow when she passed out from sheer exhaustion. Xena came in and quietly closed the door when Gabrielle pressed her finger to her own lips indicating the Sheriff was asleep.

"There's no sign of her, I've informed Solari to ask around the watchtowers to see if she left the village," Xena whispered.

Gabrielle nodded her head in acknowledgment but continued to stroke the long blonde hair that draped over her bare legs.

"Do you really think she would leave the village?" Xena asked and sat down on the armrest next to her bard.

"It wouldn't be the first time that woman has run since we got here," Gabrielle replied quietly.

"Well I hope you are wrong, the woods aren't safe."

The bard looked up at her warrior with worry, "Me too."

Xena quickly got to her feet and answered the door before a second knock could be rapped. She came back to her Queen with a hopeful look in her eyes. "Watchtowers report no one left."

"No one saw her leave last time either," Gabrielle countered in a whisper.

Emma stirred despite how quiet the couple was trying to be and sat up and wiped her chin of any drool. Emma asked, still groggy, "What happened?"

Gabrielle looked up at Xena and carefully replied, "Nothing as far as we know."

"Okay," Emma mumbled and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. "Sorry I crashed I haven't been sleeping well."

"It's okay Emma. Sleep disruption is pretty standard considering. I'm sure this world is a big change for you, and the stuff with the raid can't be easy to…"

"No," Emma stated simply. "I don't want to talk about that."

The Sheriff stood and put some distance between herself and the couple who appeared to be scrutinizing her. She felt the pressure of their eyes and felt the need to leave the hut, to go and talk to Regina about all the things she needed to set straight. Or at very least just to go and see the woman. "I'm, uh going to go check on R'gina. I'll see you guys tonight huh?"

Xena folded her arms and continued her silent study of the Sheriff, but Gabrielle spoke up, first glancing Xena's way before speaking. "She hasn't returned to your hut yet."

Emma's green eyes met Xena's before looking back to the bard and asked cautiously, "Okay…?"

"I don't want to frighten you," the Queen said as she stood.

Concern clouded the taller woman's sleepy eyes and she begged, "Then stop. Just tell me."

Xena spoke frankly, not being one to sugar coat things and appreciating the most direct course of
action. "I went to check on her, and no one has seen her."

"No one no one?"

Xena's mask slipped, and confusion crossed her features as she looked to her bard for help. Gabrielle put a reassuring hand on her warrior's knee and answered Emma, "No one saw her leave, but no one has seen her around either."

"And she's not in your hut or the baths," Xena added dutifully, pushing away the strange way the sheriff communicated.

"Did you check with Maggie? I mean, Regina likes her," Emma asked and then amended when Xena gave her a skeptical look. "I mean as far as Regina liking people go." The Sheriff took a deep breath, "I'll go check the healer tent, she's been having headaches, she is probably there getting meds. Unlike the Evil Queen, my... uh... the real Regina wouldn't be foolish enough to run off." Emma shook her head slightly at her slip up, and she huffed as her inner-self started in on her silently from within. "I'll find her. It's what we Charming's do." She smiled mirthlessly when both the warrior and the bard looked to one another for guidance. She thanked the couple and apologized again for waking them. She reassured the bard that she would take what she said under advisement and told the couple she would see them that night at the celebration.

Emma found Magdalus in the healer's hut, the woman had an earful for the likes of Emma Swan and after fifteen minutes of the blonde replying with "I know!", "I am an idiot!" and "I fucked up!" Maggie felt the blonde was chastised well enough to answer the Sheriff's questions. She informed her that the Mayor was safe and well and not as angry as she was when Maggie first encountered her. The blonde visibly relaxed at this news.

"I realize this isn't my place Sheriff," Magdalus started, completely unable to keep her opinions to herself. Maggie sighed and placed a hand on the young woman's shoulder, "You both are on equal footing in the idiot department."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I've promised your Mayor that I would no longer speak to her on this subject because I've said my peace, she doesn't find my opinions credible. But you Sheriff, I never said I wouldn't meddle you up, down and sideways."

Emma took a step back uncertain as to what the much older woman was trying to say and whispered, "What?"

"By Zeus! You need to tell that little girl how you feel!" The older woman folded her arms over her chest and shook her head as she watched the walls shoot sky high around the blonde. "Oh no, we will have none of that," the healer pushed the blonde off balance, and she crashed down into the chair behind her. Maggie placed her hands on the table in front of her and looked down on the startled blonde. "You need to tell her. She needs to hear the words. The actual words."

"Wh-what words?"

"You know what damn words girl! Don't be the idiot our dear Mayor insists you are!"

The blonde blushed knowingly then grumbled, "She's not wrong."

"She's not right," Maggie countered and stared the blonde down.
"Gabby said the same thing," Emma mumbled.

"Well, our Queen..." Maggie shook her head and amended, "Our former Queen is a wise woman."

"Yeah but..."

The healer cut her off "Yeah but... You could have lost her Emma! For good! She would have been gone and never knew..."

"Don't you think I know that? Don't you think I've thought nothing BUT that since the day she got darted? I know that Maggie! I know that, and that fact scares the shit out of me! I've peered over the edge of what life would be like without Regina Mills, and no, I can't do it. I can't lose her. I just can't!"

Maggie barked back, "Well while you are perfectly content with sitting back and enjoying the status quo, that girl is sitting around thinking she is unworthy! Especially by the likes of you!"

"What the hell are you talking about, unworthy? Unworthy? She is the most worthy! She is everything! I've never met anyone who could do what she has done! She survived what she lived through and is beautiful and composed and fucking brilliant! She... she... is SO worthy! She deserves only the best! So don't tell me she is unworthy!"

"I'm not the one who thinks that, Sheriff," Maggie replied softly in the face of the passionate Savior. Emma blushed when she realized she was not only shouting but at some point she stood and got in the face of the brunette across from her. Emma swallowed hard and tried to control her breathing as she righted the chair and sat back down across from her friend.

Maggie took a deep breath when the Sheriff did not reply. "Right. I am also not the one who needs to be convinced of that little girl's worth! Why do you think the book showed back up?" Maggie asked with an eyebrow lift.

Emma's eyes grew wide at the depth of the healer's knowledge of what had transpired. "She told you about the book?"

"What she told me is inconsequential Sheriff," the healer replied curtly. "Why do you think it showed up for our little Mayor to read? Unless you are the idiot our girl insists you are, and you burned the wrong book?"

Emma scowled and looked down at the table and managed to mumble, "No. I'm sure it was the right one."

"Then why?"

"Your ridiculous gods are evil manipulators hell-bent on making my life as miserable as possible?"

Maggie rolled her eyes and sat down across from the Sheriff and replied, "Not all of them." She smirked when Emma's dimple made an appearance in a smirk of her own. "It could have been Cupid," Maggie offered up, hoping the stubborn little girl would see things clearly.

Emma rolled her eyes, "Why, is he a little troll with wings who gets off on screwing with people's friendships?"

The healer scolded, "Oh, she is more than a friendship to you. Stop it!"

He is the son of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and is known to give a little push to the stubborn
and thick skulled!

Emma pouted petulantly assuming the older woman meant her and not Regina, when in fact the healer meant them both.

"She is so mad Maggie, that book didn't make her magically want... It.. it screwed up everything!"

"You are awfully pessimistic for a savior, Sheriff."

Emma wrinkled up her nose and folded her arms around herself in a huff.

Maggie realized, like Regina, Emma couldn't be pushed, she needed to be guided. "You two are leaving this world soon, correct?" The healer side glanced the Sheriff, and the blonde nodded in agreement. "Alright well, I'll have something beautiful for you to wear for tonight delivered to your hut."

"I can't let you do that Maggie, you guys have limited resources as it is, I've got a little thing..."

"Wear it," the healer barked, "and when your Queen notices you, ask her to dance. That is my only repayment."

Emma chuckled, "Even when she says no?"

"Even if she says no." The healer shook her head and smiled wide making her look years younger than her age, "You both are two peas in a pod."
Chapter 38

Gabrielle of Potedia, battling bard and now former Queen of the Amazon Nation ruled fair and true. She had taken the right of cast seriously, and her rule was the most prosperous the Amazon women had ever had. Unbeknownst to the fair woman, her Queenship would be known as the golden age, and the nation would take her implemented laws and continue to thrive for generations to come.

This was her farewell and Amazons from the surrounding areas filtered in for the ceremonies and changing of power to the new Queen Ephiny. Most of the formal rites and practices went on behind closed doors, the taking of the sacred herb and decorative painting of the new Queen so she could be purified in the light of mother moon. Ritual dances were performed, and oaths were spoken in ancient tongues. By the time the celebration started, it had taken a few days time to maneuver the ceremonies and Gabrielle was exhausted.

She sat at the back table with her warrior princess, and several close friends, and watched her former subjects celebrate their new leader with dancing, drink, and much food. Gabrielle ate her fill and was leaning back against her warrior and listened to the women around her, share stories of her rule.

This was the beginning of her lore that would be immortalized in Amazon history, and she felt the weight of its importance. She knew they would flourish even without her, they were strong and competent, and the new Queen had been moulded by herself into a smart, level-headed leader.

Yet she still felt the loss. What would she do in this new world? How different would it be? Would Xena be happy there? She'd been so confident of this course of action until it was time to place the ceremonial mask into her friend's hands. Doubt crept into her heart.

Fear.

The unknown was frightening, but as she sat here watching her love destroy three-quarters of a turkey, she knew that as long as she was with this woman, it didn't matter where they were.

The platinum blonde to Gabrielle's right tapped her on the shoulder pulling her from her musings.

"They are about to start," the Amazon announced with a giant smile and stood up to join the crowd that was gathering around the center of the arena.

"Right behind you Cyane!" she called and urged her warrior princess to put down her fork with a promise they wouldn't be long.

The bard wormed her way through the tightly packed leather-clad women, her warrior in tow until she got a position where her shorter stature could see the events.

The large area was cleared, and several of her sisters were all dressed in thick ancestral garb. The women were seemingly cumbersome and slow under the heavy leather outfits. Their movements were both chaotic yet symmetrical as they moved about the inner circle. The slow beat of the drums began to pick up speed readily and as they did the women started to shed bits and pieces of their costumes.

As the thick leather fell to the outside of the circle, the women began to gain cohesion, working as a group rather than each one seemingly doing their own thing. The dancers ebbed and flowed with the beat of the drum, and the women started to chant as they contorted their bodies around one
another. They still seemed to be each doing their own dance, some of them were sparring randomly with each other, and as the music picked up, they dropped their burdens behind.

Once the drums reached a fevered pitch, they stopped dead as did the women dancers. Silence blanketed the area as enamored eyes feasted on the still lifeless bodies of the Amazon dancers that all fell to the ground. A lone woman was lifted from the center of the bodies from seemingly thin air. She carried a staff weapon and was masked in a replica of the ceremonial Queen's headdress. A yellow cornsilk wig adorned the young Queen, and she walked around the bodies of the Amazon dancers and lifted them, each, one at a time as the drum slowly beat on.

When all of the dancers were back on their feet, they circled the blonde Queen, lifting swords and pledging their allegiances to her. The mock Queen pantomimed her humble beginning, not accepting the admiration of the women she single-handedly saved, but the dancers were adamant. They started to dance and contort their bodies in unison, chanting songs of old in honor of their Queen.

Finally, their armor had all been stripped down, and each of the dancers wore a thin belt with matching modesty garment that barely covered her sex. The blonde was hesitant in accepting their admiration, and the women dancers bowed to their Queen, united.

Gabrielle was startled when a large mask covered barbarian pushed their way past her, and she was alarmed for but a moment when she saw several other masked beasts enter the circle and begin the choreographed attack on the armorless amazons.

The women tried to pull the Queen to safety, but she instead stood before her subjects in the line of fire holding her staff weapon out and dropping it to the ground as if to signify the line in the sand. "No one shall pass!" the Queen roared and then punched the ground.

As soon as the masked Queen's fist made contact with the dirt, the barbarians, in waved succession, were all knocked off their feet. The dancers lifted their leader in victory as their great protector, and they celebrated in unified dance.

Xena put her arm around her bard who stood and watched the singing women and whispered into her ear, "You made a difference here Gabrielle. I can't wait to see what you do next."

"You and me both," the blonde replied absently.

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Emma hadn't seen Regina since that morning when they fought, and she was feeling anxious about having a confrontation during the celebration. She knew the Mayor was one to hold a grudge as if it were any big secret, and she figured things wouldn't be resolved until they faced one another.

She smoothed her sweaty palms together and shook them in the air to dry them off a bit. She squinted as she scanned the rather large crowd of women, having lost her contacts after their first night in this realm, looking for one particular brunette. She noticed Magdalus first; the tall, dark woman held a presence that was unmistakable even in Emma's slightly fuzzy view of the world. The Mayor was standing next to the healer looking a little more than uncomfortable with the size and consequent rowdiness of the party goers.

Regina was wearing a very flattering dress to Emma's own, surely by Maggie's urging and the woman looked stunning. Not that there has ever been a time Emma thought otherwise. The dark gray knee-length gown hugged the Mayor in all the right places and billowed out around the woman's hips. Emma felt the draw of her attraction almost immediately, and as her heart quickened and mouth dried, she made her way over to her Queen.
"Regina? You look, beautiful." Emma's shy smile did nothing to hide the lustful eyes she suddenly had for the Queen. There wasn't a moment where Emma made a decision to start looking at the Mayor in such a way, but her time in the last month has created a perfect storm which allowed her to appreciate her son's mother's abundant attributes.

Regina was startled by the Sheriff's sudden appearance, she was keeping an eye out for the taller blonde and didn't notice the woman cut through the crowd of warriors to stand next to her. Her dark eyes raked down over the Savior's dress, resting a little too long on her bare hip as she wondered if the woman had on undergarments or not. Her cheeks pinkened a little when her eyes finally met Emma's, and she realized she had been caught looking. She cleared her throat and slipped on her mask of indifference suddenly remembering she was supposed to be angry with the Savior.

"Thank you, Miss Swan." Brown eyes side glanced the Savior's form a few more times in quick succession before Regina returned the compliment, "You clean up well yourself Sheriff."

Emma stood awkwardly for a few moments before she finally talked herself up enough to address the elephant in the room. "Look I'm sorry about the stuff that happened this morning. I-I didn't handle things right I guess. I..."

"We don't need to talk about it, Miss Swan." Regina held firm to her icy stance, and Emma knew there wasn't going to be an easy way to get through this.

"No. Not while we are back to Miss Swanning me, clearly we need to talk, Regina."

"Now is not the time!" Danger flashed in the dark eyes of the Mayor and from experience Emma should have known to back off the volatile Queen, but she was shut out all day and like it or not, she was going to be heard.

"I'm sorry."

"Stop."

Emma shook her head, "No. I'm sorry I didn't believe that our friendship could recover if you knew the truth."

The Mayor gritted her teeth and took a threatening step forward, "Miss Swan you will cease this conversation immediately or so help me..."

Emma held her ground, never one to back down from the Mayor, even when all sense and reason told her she ought to. "Or what? You'll punish me?"

The Queen's upper lip curled into a snarl and Emma leapt into the unknown and admitted, "I was scared! Okay? I panicked because I can't lose you again!"

Both women stood silent for several long moments, eyes locked in an intense staredown they were both familiar with, but before either of them could speak next, the clearing of a throat broke the spell they had seemingly put over one another. "Sheriff?" A warm tentative hand was placed on Emma's shoulder, and she turned to face the unknowing intruder.

"Solari?" Emma asked surprised to find other people existed in the world after staring into the abyss of Regina Mills' eyes.

"Emma," the awkward smile of the warrior sent warning bells off in Emma's head, but she was frozen in place to suffer the question that was shyly asked. "I was wondering if you'd like to dance
with me? I can show you some of our customary dance moves?” The dark amazon usually held the confidence and poise of the warrior she was, but at this moment she looked every bit the shy awkward girl she was in the face of possible rejection.

"I-" Emma stammered as her brain struggled to regain footing, but managed to remain completely blank. With her attention focused on letting this muscle-bound warrior down gently, Emma hadn't noticed the brunette she wanted to dance with sleek off into the crowd.

Emma took a deep breath when she saw the girl's hopes start to fall just a little and she pulled herself together. "I'm here with-" Emma turned and noticed Regina was long gone and she cursed under her breath. "I... what I mean is, I'm flattered Solari, but I um... maybe later?" The Savior chickened out, but the disappointment in the warrior's eyes told her she got the message loud and clear.

Panic settled in the blonde as the healer's words came back to her and she cursed under her breath once again, "I'm sorry Solari, I need to go!" Emma said and made her way through the crowd in the only direction she could think the Mayor would go.

The Savior was pushing her, which wasn't unusual for the blonde, but right now she did not want to be pushed.

_I panicked because I can't lose you again!_

Normally their concern for one another was blamed on their mutual love for their shared son. That they were doing this or that for his benefit solely. She knew the game; she played it well. This, however, was decidedly not that. It was a need, based only in self-preservation. _I can't lose you_ were the words she said. They were the words she chose when any number of reasons could have been stated to adhere to their working protocol of expressing fondness for one another.

_But she didn't. She said she couldn't lose me._

_And those eyes. She meant those words. Fear was plainly seen._

_I know fear. I cause fear. I know what it looks like, unsaid reflected in a person's eyes._

_I specifically know that fear. The fear of losing this irritating blonde. That fear has gripped me on more than one occasion, and it isn't pleasant. It has made me do irrational things._

An unfamiliar voice sounded out and broke Regina from her inner musings, "Sheriff?"

The Savior answered, "Solari?"

_Emma knew this girl? Of course. This was the girl who brought the Savior home semiconscious and grief-stricken._

"Emma," The soft, demure sound that created the name of the Savior settled within the Mayor's gut like a chilled stone, and it took all of the control she had not to grab the blonde that stood facing away from her and pull her back to attention. Back to what was supposed to be important.

_She will never be as important..._

Once again, the Savior's attention was on muscular shoulders, and dark, brooding features and Regina could feel the jealous barbs wind their way around her. She turned from the scene and fled.
Leaving the pure of heart Sheriff to her dalliances with whatever Amazon warrior sought her fancy.  

_She will never see me._  

She pushed her way through the crowd, back toward the safety and quiet of her hut. The hut she shared with Emma, but she mused the blonde wouldn't be back for hours.  

_If at all._  

She heard her name faintly, but it was drowned out by the beating drums and the roar of the crowd, and she just assumed she imagined it.  

Everything that Magdalus said that afternoon piled onto her and the weight of it ignited her anger. She knew better than to listen to others, people who didn't _know_. Sure she could see how the healer came to some of the conclusions she did, but in the end, she knew Emma Swan. _Really knew her._ She knew what their relationship was and what it was _not_. Any and all thoughts to the contrary was foolish drivel conjured up by an imaginative, yet delusional, meddling old woman!
Chapter 39

Xena was enjoying her ale with her bard and a few friends when she noticed Regina forcefully making her way through the Amazon partiers. She was privy to Maggie's plan to get the two foreigners to finally get over themselves and realize what everyone around them knew, she had a feeling it would blow up and if Regina's deep scowl was any indication, blow up it had.

A few minutes later a frantic looking blonde stumbled over to their table and asked if they had seen her little Queen. Xena had enough ale at that point to think herself funny and spoke up, "You really should put a bell around her neck with how often you lose her huh?"

A slap in the shoulder from her bard forced a half-hearted apologetic smirk from the warrior, and she pointed the Sheriff in the direction the Mayor had run off.

"What?" the slightly intoxicated warrior asked as smoldering green eyes bore into her.

"You are not funny, warrior princess."

"As a matter of common opinion, my bard, I am!" Her overconfident sly smile slid across her face, and she pulled her Queen because she would always be Xena's Queen even if a ruler not, into a searing kiss.

"Oh, my Princess thinks she is a tough girl hmm?" Icy confidence slid over the bard and made Xena tremble with need. She knew that look and what it meant.

It meant she would be switching to water for the remainder of the evening because their activities post party bliss would be worth being sober.

Emma took off in the direction Xena pointed and weaved between the dancing women. She called out for Regina then finally broke through the crowd. In the dim light of dusk, she saw Regina briskly walking toward the center of the village.

Emma's mind was spinning, all of the things Maggie and Gabby said about how she needed to be the one to come clean and the only thing stopping her was her fear of losing the woman. She knew Regina better than they did, right? They couldn't see things in the woman she couldn't... Right? I know her, better than anyone ever has...

The Evil Queen's words struck home to Emma, "Whomever I turn into, trust me when I say, I am in desperate need of your love..."

Emma's adrenaline surged, and she broke out into a jog, running after her Mayor. Of course being graceful was not one of Emma Swan's blessings, so she tripped and stumbled a few yards from the woman she was chasing. She doesn't quite fall but does end up startling the Mayor who comes to a stop and whipped around to face the now blushing Savior.

"Trip over that thick air dear?" Regina snarked cooly.

"It's not like there are street lights Regina!" Emma complained in her defense and asked, "Where are you going? I mean, are you okay?"

"Of course, I'm wonderful," Regina lied and Emma was visibly unconvinced, so she added, "Go back to the party, I've just got a little bit of a headache, so I'm turning in. Go have fun with your
little warrior." Jealousy tainted the brunette's words, and Emma's heart started to pound hard in her chest.

"You have a headache? How bad is it?" Emma moved closer, her concern written across her low, worried brow.

"Not terrible," Regina admitted. She did have a headache, a mild one, she was using it as an excuse to get away from having to watch the Sheriff grind up against that brunette warrior.

Emma reached out and took the woman's elbow, "Can I walk you home then?"

"Only because I'm not sure where I am going," Regina said truthfully. It was dusk, and the village was very dark, and even in the daytime, she had no idea how to navigate the complex hierarchy of huts and tents that made up the bulk of the village.

"I want to apologize for taking your book," Emma announced before she lost her nerve and Regina sighed internally, then externally and grumbled in warning, "Emma…"

"Let me finish," the blonde interrupted and kept their momentum walking the Mayor towards their home. "Some things happened that scared me. Really honestly frightened me. This little trip has been kind of a whirlwind for me personally, and I don't always deal with things that scare me in the right way." She took a deep breath and sighed before admitting, "My experiences have taught me how to protect myself quite well, but I don't always take other people's feelings into consideration." She bit her bottom lip. "Because I've never really had to before and honestly, I don't really know how to do that." Emma hoped Regina knew her well enough to understand.

She stopped at the front porch of their cabin and finally turned to face Regina in the light of the Xenaverse moons, "I am truly sorry."

"I am not happy about you thinking you had the right to take something that belonged to me, and I don't really understand why you would keep it from me." She broke eye contact and added, "There were things you now know about me that I am not necessarily comfortable with either Miss Swan, but I am not the kind of woman who deals well with half-truths and misinformation." Regina folded her arms around herself in the chill of the night and added, "but I suppose, I can accept your apology."

"I know, I just, I was scared…"

"Scared," Regina said in unison with the Sheriff then asked, "Scared of what exactly? I know better than anyone how difficult it must have been for you to wrangle the Evil Queen Emma. Lying to her was probably the only way you got her to comply what very little she did! I can not fault you for that."

"Lying to… the Evil Queen?" Emma's mind went over those few hard weeks trying desperately to think of lies she told and only came up with her fake relationship with the Mayor. "No I lied to the Mayor, a lie of omission, but I came clean, so it shouldn't count as a lie Regina," Emma said quickly without really thinking through what the woman said.

"I haven't actually finished all of the accounts of the Mayor's time here in the Xenaverse," Regina admitted with a scowl.

Everything Maggie said to Emma that afternoon came crashing over her, and she knew at that moment what lie Regina was talking about.

She thinks she is unworthy of you.
Fear gripped her, and she could feel her knees grow weak. "Emma? Are you alright?"

She heard Regina ask the words and all she could do was lie and nod her head in response. She steadied herself by putting her hand against the wooden beam that held up the porch's roof and made a decision. It was time. She needed to tell her, damn the consequences.

Of course in true Swan fashion, the words were muddied up, and she began stuttering awkwardly before she shook her head and stopped. She took a deep breath and reached out and took the brunette's hands.

*Declarations of love always involve hand holding, right?*

"Regina, I didn't lie to the Evil Queen. I can't have you thinking I did. Because I didn't. At all."

"It is quite alright Emma, as I said…"

"No," Emma interrupted and swallowed thickly before saying, "I... I love you. Regina. I have for some time."

The surprised laugh that came out of the brunette startled Emma, and for a moment dread gripped her. However, because she had years of experience seeing this woman's true motivations, she saw the hope and the pain of feeling that hope, and when she started to shake her head, Emma bit down and pressed on. "I am in love with you Regina Mills."

The hurt in the woman's eyes turned to anger in the beat of a heart, and she spat, "Why? because now that you think you know something about my past?"

"What? No. I've loved you for a long, long time," Emma defended herself knowing Regina was going to make things as difficult as possible, but the Savior clung to that hope, that hope she saw in those dark expressive eyes. She held onto that like a lifeline.

"Stop it, Miss Swan! I will not listen to this! I don't know what you think you are going to accomplish…"

Emma leaned in and grabbed the woman around her waist and crashed their lips together, both silencing and stopping that train of thought from getting away from the Mayor. Emma poured all of the trust and respect and affection she had for Regina into that kiss.

After a few seconds, when she realized she wasn't being pushed away, nor slapped silly, she added the raw passion she felt and heated the kiss exponentially, walking the Mayor backward until the wooden door to their hut stopped them.

Regina for her part was taken by surprise by the move and forgot to fight back. She allowed the kiss to continue out of automatic-response and once her brain caught up to what was happening, she felt her body react to the contact. The words the blonde said settled inside of her and burned away the instinct to think this was some elaborate ruse to make her a fool.

When Emma deepened the kiss she wrapped her hands up in the fabric of the Queen's dress and the fear within her held her tight as if she didn't hold on, she would lose her for good.

The Queen's own hands found purchase and gripped the Savior's tight body and held on with the same veracity. Because the Queen was complex and used to causing her own misery, she broke the embrace and breathlessly whispered the blonde's name, "Emma."

It was a question; it was validation, it was seeking a connection to the woman she knew.
The Savior's response was dripping with need. Her time in the Xenaverse had chipped away at the walls that hid her desire, and she could no longer hold back the flood that threatened to crash over her, "Regina."

The whispers between the women were a promise of what was to come. They stood for what seemed like an eternity, arms wrapped around one another, eyes studying expressions, searching one another for doubt or falsehoods.

The Mayor decided at that moment to let go of her tight grip on what she thought was to be true, Emma made the first move, she would take the next step, no matter how frightened she was to trust again.

*To love again.*

All of the millions of reasons she's been telling herself why this would not, could not happen fell away, and she melted into the blonde who held her with such reverence, she brushed her lips tentatively against the Savior's own and savored the feel of Emma's gentle caress.

She pushed in tighter with the growing need she had actively stuffed away for years, her desire exploded as the Savior's hands began to roam over her, exploring her in ways she has only felt in her dreams. She begrudgingly released one of her hands from the Savior's backside and reached behind herself to open the door. The latch clicked open, and the couple stumbled into the darkness.

Emma laid her Queen back on the bed they were about to share and hovered over the nervous woman beneath her. Her soft green eyes focused on the dark pools roaming over her form.

"You are the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on Regina Mills." The blonde's words settled over the Queen and that need she kept a tight lid on ignited, she rolled them over and took command atop the Savior. She sat up and straddled the muscular frame beneath her. A playful smile parted the lips of the former Queen, and with nervous hands, she touched Emma's abdomen. She slid around and gripped either side of the woman's flank, sliding her thumbs up under the braless chest of the Savior.

Emma's own hands slid up her thighs, further, under the dress she wished she wasn't wearing and the Queen could feel calloused fingertips inch their way up to her hips.

Lost for a moment, feeling the pull of her desire settle between her legs she rolled her hips and pressed herself against the woman beneath her which immediately extracted an excited whine from the Savior's lips. "Oh god, Regina yes!"

Spurred on with what she viewed as uninhibited consent, Regina slid her hands into place over the pebbled peaks of the Savior's breasts. She was enjoying how responsive the blonde was but wanted nothing more than to feel flesh beneath her fingers instead of whatever cotton and chiffon thing that was covering the object of Regina's desires.

As if Emma could read her mind, her strong hands continued their way up taking with them the dress that hid the Queen from view. She reluctantly lifted her arms and allowed Emma to remove the dress in its entirety. Her arms came back down and covered her swollen breasts, and Emma sat up, after tossing the dress aside, gently kissed the backs of the Queen's hands, cautiously coaxing her to reveal herself to the Savior. She was bare in a way she was unused to, beyond mere nudity, as if her very soul was on display for this woman.

Emma felt the Queen's body tremble with her uncertainty, so she cupped a soft cheek with the palm of her hand, both comforting and reassuring the woman she loved. "You are safe Regina," Emma
whispered as she pulled the woman into a kiss.

If the first kiss they shared was questioning and uncertain, this kiss was the kiss that answered all unasked questions. It was soft and firm, certain and bold, the Savior took her time but also control and laid out her love for the tiny Queen wrapped up in her lap.

She exclaimed when it felt like the Savior was slowing the pace of her love, "Emma I need you!"

"You have me, my Queen," Emma kissed down the column of Regina's neck and settled over the spot where she could feel the Mayor's heart race. She licked and raked her teeth over that tender spot until deep groans were erupting from the Mayor's throat. The urgency the brunette had doubled as Emma slowly made her way down savoring every taste of the Queen's soft skin.

Regina's hunger was wound tight, and she could feel the damp desire heat her center, and she wanted nothing more than to have the Savior quench her craving, but Emma was taking her time, and the Queen's control was unraveling.

She pulled on the strings that held the dress onto the Sheriff and exposed porcelain flesh when the fabric was removed. Her lips found a place just above the Savior's collarbone that elicited a groan from the blonde that caused Regina's insides to melt.

Emma could see the frantic look in her lover's eyes and knew all too well that fear the Queen felt in this moment. It was a fear you often saw in the foster system in the eyes of children who loved and then had that love ripped away for no apparent reason.

Be it, potential parents, siblings or even a favored toy; the loss was ingrained and always left a scar. Regina had scars that Emma was an unwilling witness to and knew the woman was rushing to have and hold her while she still could, before, like so many before her, Emma would be cruelly taken away.

The Sheriff laid the Queen back, and after removing the remainder of the dress that barely clung to her hips, she looked down at this woman who had been the source of both pain and joy within her life.

"We have time. Let me savor you, my Queen," Emma's desire filled voice cracked as she hovered over the naked form of the Mayor. Her golden curls slipped off her shoulders and caressed the Queen's skin causing gooseflesh to appear as she moved painfully slow down her body.

Regina's eyes stung with unshed tears, and her body was frozen, unable to do anything but feel the Savior's soft, reverent exploration of her body. Each touch was overwhelming. Every kiss sent shockwaves through her system, and she was paralyzed within her emotion. The Savior's lips parted, and her warm tongue trailed down over her hip, and she felt the cramping of muscles in her hands as she gripped the bedsheets for dear life.

"Regina," the Savior's soft melodic voice pulled her from that realm where all she could do was feel and brought her back in an instant.

"Look at me," the soft demand from her Savior made her eyes snap open, and she looked down to meet the dark jade peering up from between her legs. The second her thoughts registered what was about to happen, the Savior placed her mouth on her sodden center, never breaking the connection of the gaze she held and Regina lost all semblance of control over her body.

Emma's first taste of her Queen sent quakes of pleasure through her body as her tongue slid in and around the damp folds of the panting moaning Mayor. She softly lavished the Queen's swollen
center with kisses and long, languid licks drawing out the Queen's pleasure, extending her own. She had dreamt of what the Queen would taste like, and reality did not disappoint as she slowly wound Regina up to her climax.

She felt an emotional release crash over her as the Queen's cries in ecstasy drowned out any other thoughts. Tears clung to her cheeks as the burden she had been carrying for so long was finally lifted off of her shoulders.

The events of this trip took its toll, and in the face of what could be a beautiful future with the woman she was in love with, Emma found herself relieved, finally. She didn't realize how heavy that burden was until it was lifted off of her and she felt energized and alive lying between shaking thighs.

"Em-ma…" the breathless brunette called feebly, and Emma wiped away the tears to tend to her Queen.

"I'm here Regina," Emma covered the sweat-soaked shivering Queen with the warmth of her own body.

"Please, I need you!" Regina, feeling the weight of her own worries pulled the Savior closer as if she would magically disappear from her bed and her life.

Emma kissed her Queen gently and said, "We have the rest of our lives if you want it."

A brunette head nodded furiously in the dark, she finally let the tears fall and let the Savior wrap around her. She was safe in this woman's embrace.
Chapter 40

Xena awoke with a sore backside and some fond memories of the previous evening. She looked down to the messy strawberry blonde in the crook of her arm using her as a pillow. She breathed in her bard's scent and then gently de-tangled herself from the girl's possessive bear hug. She got up and got dressed then headed out to begin her daily morning ritual.

The early morning was crisp, and there was a light frost that covered the ordinarily dewy grass of the training yard. Small puffs of breath, white with condensation, escaped her as she started by limbering up her cool muscles. Once sufficiently warm, she ran scuttle the length of the field, touching down the two large rocks on either side of the practice yard. She ran hard until she felt the sweat cover her body. She stopped in the center of the arena and immediately went into her aerobic hand to hand form.

She imagined in her mind's eye warriors all around her and executed each blow with practiced ease. Once she finished with the lengthy dance, she stood and bounced on the balls of her feet and rolled her head to stretch the tight knots in her neck and waved her sword around herself pulling her muscles in preparation of her work out. She held the sword still and felt the hair on the back of her neck raise and knew she was no longer alone.

The god of war watched his favored as she practiced her art, the fluidity of her movement was music, and he felt himself grow hard with his anticipation. She slowed her movements and sheathed her sword, and he knew at that moment, she knew, he was there. With a smirk, Ares began to slow clap in a show of condescension as he removed his invisibility cloak so the object of his obsession could view him. His anger notched up when the warrior princess did not spare a glance his way.

She held still, with one foot in front of the other, her hands held in a zen pose in front of her serene face. Her ear twitched as she focused on hearing every move the god of war made. The crunch of pebbles under his leather boots, the way the gentle wind was disturbed as he moved closer to her, she closed her eyes and envisioned him, his proximity, how quickly he approached her.

Like lightning, she rotated and let loose a flurry of jabs to the god of war's face and torso. She landed the first strike, but the god quickly blocked the remaining attacks. He chuckled when she landed a surprise hook to his jaw, and he lost his balance and tumbled to the ground. He used his forward momentum to roll back into a standing position, pulling his sword from the scabbard on his back. He spat blood from his mouth and chuckled when he blocked the sword attack. Sparks flew when the enchanted metal from each blade came together between them. Xena cackled as she parried and landed a solid kick to the god of war's midsection.

Ares recovered the kick and went on the attack. The dark god pushed, with all his might, against her defensive stance and each of them held their ground. Locked dead, the god of war leaned into the leggy brunette and cooed, "Come now Xena, you want this as much as I do."

The warrior princess grimaced in strain and spat, "I haven't wanted what you've wanted in a very long time, Ares."

The dark god smiled, and dimples carved themselves a place in his cheeks. "I have an army for you, my love."
Xena flashed a bright white smile, her eyes pitted with excitement, "You have half an army, Ares. I know because I was there when they were cut down like the paper soldiers they were!"

Summoning her reserve strength, she pushed him back. He stood the length of his height and sheathed his sword, bored of the banter. With a snap of the fingers, Ares had the warrior princess's weapon in his hand pointing it back at the taller brunette. "You say you don't want this, but I am the god of war Xena. I feel it when you enjoy the fight."

"I'm done playing these games Ares," the contempt she felt for him was thick in her voice.

He reached out his free hand as if he imagined what the world would look like in his totalitarian future. "What I'm offering is to end the violence in a show of power. An army of peacekeepers Xena, just imagine! You'll rule them all with the might and brawn of Ares!" He pumped his arm and flexed his considerable muscle for the woman before him.

She snarked, "Ares, god of peace? Now I've heard everything!"

"Look," she said putting up her hands in surrender when his eyes darkened dangerously. "I get it alright? You were born with this one track mind. War. It is who you are and who you will always be."

Ares knelt on one knee before his warrior princess and offered up her sword, hilt side up. "Join me, Xena, worship me, and we will bring peace to this world."

"I don't have the desire for your chaos anymore Ares." Xena remained stoic and solemn.

"Ah, it's organized chaos, Xena!" He defended with a charming dimpled smile.

She shook her head slowly and decided to share with him a piece of herself. "When you found me, I was lost, for a long time I put the wrong things at the top of my priority list and then one day, I found myself. I found a reason to truly live."

"You were never lost, princess. You were exactly where you were supposed to be, by my side." he smiled up at her not hearing the words that were poured from her heart.

She rolled her eyes and took her sword from his hand and sheathed it. She stopped trying to make the god of war understand and got right to the point. "I'm not joining you, Ares. Not in this life."

The god's eyes grew dark as he stood and stewed in his rejection. "It's that irritating little blonde isn't it Xena? Wouldn't she jump at the chance to spread peace throughout the land?"

"Not the way you want to do it! Gabrielle has already made her mark on this world, and it will spread because it is peace through love, and that is something you will never understand," she argued and then sighed knowing he would never get it. "Go home, Ares."

The god of war cackled at the audacity of his love. "Peace through love? I think your little bitch has been hanging around my sister a little too often." He began to circle the warrior princess, forcing the woman to pivot in her stance as he spoke, "No Xena, love is weakness. Strength is power," the words dripped from his lips with seduction.

Her face displayed the pity she felt for him, and she put her hand on his shoulder and replied, "No. Love is power. I'm sorry you will never understand that Ares." She gave him one last pat and then turned from him and headed to the public baths. He watched her go for a moment before he disappeared in a sparkling white light reappearing back in the throne room of his earthly castle.
He instantly threw a fireball into the far wall where the head of a mounted gorgon head burst into flames. Fire engulfed the flesh and the rotting snakes that made the hair of the gorgon dripped fiery drops to the stone floor. His manly roar bellowed against the stone walls of the room, and Olseph came running in from the other room to see what was the matter.

"What has you vexed my lord?!" Olseph cried out as he dropped to his knees.

"That woman! That woman will be my downfall!" Ares spat not hearing the question.

"Which woman?" Olseph asked nervously. He knew the god of war to have insatiable tastes for flesh, and the god was never without an entourage of the fairer sex, but also feared his master spoke of Xena.

"No, not my downfall, she is my masterpiece! " The dark god grabbed the large golden goblet off of the table and knocked back the wine. He gulped a second drink before continuing his tirade by throwing the goblet into the fireplace. "It's that brat of hers! I will not let her stand in the way of my favored! She has a destiny!"

Ares started to pace the length of the room rambling in the insanity that the warrior princess caused within him. Unseen by the god of war, Olseph's scarred features fell, his hopes dashed as the realization hit him that the god he devoted his life to would never see him as the replacement for his treasured warrior princess. He got to his feet and his features darkened, he will earn the right to be the next destroyer of nations, he will earn his place at the right hand of his god. He will do what no one else has been able to do.

He will destroy Xena.

Regina stirred as the light of the morning lit up her eyelids. Her eyes popped open when the arm that was wound around her pulled her up against the warm skin of the body behind her. She remembered the previous evening's escapades and blushed lightly at what they had done; now it was the light of day. Her body felt well used, and she was sore in the most wonderful of ways.

Wet lips caressed the base of the back of her neck, and a hoarse voice said, "Good morning beautiful." Regina felt her body react to the husky words, and a warmth enveloped her. Her mind sprung a million thoughts of how this beautiful feeling she felt was unreal, untrue and undeserved, so she closed her eyes so she could just feel the strength of the woman who held her. Thoughts started to get darker, and she felt herself begin to lose the battle of positivity within herself.

Emma felt the conflict in the woman she held as Regina fought against herself within the savior's arms. "Hey?" Emma said quietly into the mess of dark curls, "Talk to me."

"I…" Regina began but shook her head when a stark truth she had known all of her life rose up to be verbalized.

Emma felt the conflict in the woman she held as Regina fought against herself within the savior's arms. "Hey?" Emma said quietly into the mess of dark curls, "Talk to me."

"I…" Regina began but shook her head when a stark truth she had known all of her life rose up to be verbalized.

Emma attempted to turn the queen around to be able to see the woman's face. She had a feeling she knew what was wrong, but she wanted to see the woman just to be sure.

Regina resisted the blonde's attempt and instead leaned back into the savior, "Emma please…"

Arms encircled the queen, and Emma stopped trying to force the woman to look at her. She knew her new lover was second-guessing herself and she pushed away the dark thoughts, about that glaringly obvious fact, stirred up. "Anything Regina, tell me what I can do to help?"

"I.. don't know," the queen replied cautiously.
"Okay. Can you tell me what's going on in that complicated head of yours?"

The queen shook her head no, and Emma tried again, "Do you regret what happened last night?"

The queen instantly barked back, "Do you?"

The harsh reaction was one hundred percent reflex, Emma knew, so she kept her reply simple. She kissed the base of the queen's neck and felt the woman shiver within her arms, and she replied, "No. Not at all." Emma felt the woman relax and then heard a deep emotion filled "Okay," in response.

After a few moments, and once Regina had filtered her feelings to the point where she was comfortable sharing them she said, "You really want this? I mean, with me?"

"More than anything," Emma answered honestly.

"I don't think you realize how difficult this will be Emma." The queen paused and then added, "What about my blood feud with your mother?"

Emma replied knowingly, "I know this has nothing to do with Snow White, Regina, so let's hear it. What's really going on?"

Regina cleared her throat and voiced her fear, "I just know you've been through quite a bit recently and I'm uncertain that you will feel whatever it is you feel here in this realm when we get home."

Even though she knew her queen well enough to hear the fear within the accusatory statement, it still hurt just a little to think that the queen was so damaged she couldn't trust in the love the savior was offering. She sat up on her elbow and physically forced the woman to turn so she could speak this massive truth, and the brunette could see the conviction within her.

"This isn't just something I started feeling because I almost lost you, Regina. I will admit that coming so close to…" Emma dropped her gaze as she felt the weight of the fear she held. "It.. it made me realize that life is so short." She gently brushed a stray strand of the brunette's hair from her face and continued, "I've known for a long time that I felt more for you than the friendship we shared, this thing that happened, just made me face it."

Regina's dark eyes studied the savior's features as if she were looking for signs of deception and Emma sighed, "I don't want to waste any more time, not one more moment. I am in love with you, and I have been for quite a while."

Regina's tight features furrowed as words uttered by the blonde came into her consciousness, I NEED you! You are my world, and I can't live this life without you! I didn't fall into the portal, you did, but I couldn't let you go! I didn't want to be without you, not for a single moment, so I jumped in after you!

"Emma?" the queen asked, "Did you fall into the portal that brought us here?"

The savior's face showed the confusion she felt and answered, "I'm here aren't I?"

"I mean, did you fall or did you jump?"

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh!"
Please, I love you, don't leave me! Prickles of tears started to form behind the queen's dark eyes as the muddied memory surfaced once more.

"Well Miss Swan?" she harshly challenged when the savior was silent and unable to meet her gaze.

"You don't get to Miss Swan me while we are naked, Regina," Emma tried to stall, but the brunette was having none of it.

"Answer me!" she demanded.

"I didn't fall," Emma admitted quietly.

The weight of what that answer meant between them hit Regina fully, and watery brown eyes looked at the savior in a new light. Determined to hold onto the anger, she put up familiar walls and spat, "Well that was stupid of you!"

"I couldn't let you..." Emma's explanation was cut off when the brunette pulled her into a searing kiss. Emma was taken by surprise but quickly recovered, and then deepened the kiss between them. The queen broke the fevered kiss and pressed her forehead against the savior's. Closing her eyes, she whispered, "You are such an idiot!"

Emma smiled and pulled her in, wrapping her arms around her and answered, "I am your idiot, your majesty."

Regina knew it would take her time to truly embrace this new life the savior was offering her, the fears she held about loving the blonde in such a deep, profound way, were just beneath the surface, always. She did her best to push the constant bombardment of negativity aside and settled in and let herself be held, and at that moment she honestly felt the love the blonde was offering, so she agreed, "That you are, Sheriff."
Magdalus was in the back tending to one of the remaining injured children from the night of the raid. The frail, pale little brunette never awoke from the restorative sleep that fateful night had inflicted upon her. The girl's wounds were severe, and she had lost a lot of blood. It had been Regina who found the internal injuries the girl suffered at the hands of her attackers and led the healer to mend them.

Of course, this Regina had no memory of saving the teen's life that night in a dimly lit cave, and Magdalus mourned the loss of the friendship she made with the woman, once again.

"Regina," the healer called over her shoulder, "Would you bring me fresh linen so I might change these bandages?" Regina saw where the woman was pointing and quickly picked up the basket and dutifully brought it as requested.

"What happened to her?" the Mayor asked quietly setting the basket down on the table next to the healer.

"Thank you dearheart. The child was injured during the attack on the village," Maggie simply said as she pulled away the old bandages. Regina cringed at the jagged suture that crossed the little girl's abdomen. "I'm sorry," the Queen offered her sincere empathy.

Maggie looked up at the woman and smiled warmly, "You saved her life, my dear girl."

"I did?"

"Yes, you saved a many of my sisters and have taught me much in the time that you've been here."

Regina saw something in the older woman's eyes, something that looked familiar, but yet wasn't and she hesitantly said, "I wish I could remember."

"Fret not dearheart, songs are already being written about the Queen from another land, you may not remember, but my sisters will never forget."

To fill her mundane time during the many years under the curse the Mayor sought out many different pursuits. Emergency medical knowledge being one of many, she explored cooking and knitting, and even touched upon automotive repair and essentially read every book the real world had to offer. It seemed as though her many skills had come in handy during this trip. Regina smiled shyly, unaccustomed to being praised for good deeds and said, "I'm glad I could help."

Maggie finished up changing the dressings for the unconscious girl and led the Mayor into the front of the hut. "Do you need more pain reliever dearheart?"

Regina shook her head and blushed a little. She was also unaccustomed to admitting being wrong. She broke her gaze and started to pace before she spoke, "We are leaving today, Emma is packing up our belongings, and I wanted to…" She looked up, and her dark eyes met the knowing gaze of the older woman. "I wanted to…" she repeated trying to grab traction on her thought processes and felt her emotions swell within her.

Maggie reached out and took the hands of the Mayor, "I'm so pleased I got to know you Regina Mills of Storybrooke."

"I'm… I mean, I… wanted…"
A satisfied knowing smile crossed the older woman's face, "You be safe dearheart." Tears fell from the Mayor's eyes, and the healer pulled her into a strong embrace. "Thank you for meddling," Regina's deep voice, thick with emotion, said into the soft material of the woman's shirt.

"You take care of that little Sheriff now you hear?" Magdalus patted the Mayor's back roughly which startled Regina into reigning in her emotions, and she promised that she would.

Xena was pacing in front of a relatively large temple when Emma and Regina showed up. "What's wrong?" Emma asked instinctively. She had gotten to know the warrior princess quite well in their time in the Xenaverse and knew that pace, was her worry pace.

"She's been in there for over a candle mark."

"What's a candle mark?" Regina asked with her hands on her hips, and Emma answered, "I think it's like an hour."

"Artemis should have answered by now," Xena stated the problem plainly, caution evident in her blue eyes. She knew seeking the Goddess of the hunt's help would be a long shot and had a discussion with Gabrielle that morning about what not to say to the powerful, spiteful, being.

"Maybe the Goddess is busy? I can't imagine what they do up there all day, but I'm sure it is something," Emma tried to reassure the warrior princess, but her voice trailed off as the raven-haired woman seemed to be focused elsewhere.

As the trio waited outside, the bard knelt in the center of the richly decorated room and prayed to the Goddess of the hunt. The walls of the temple were adorned with trophies of animals the Amazon's killed in the Goddess' name. Beautifully crafted weapons, not only bows which the Goddess was known for, but a wide variety of weapons of war were displayed proudly by the Amazon people.

"Artemis I pray to you! Please hear me!" Gabrielle spoke passionately, "My Goddess, please I need you!" The bard could hear her lover's voice just beyond the wooden door of the temple and knew their two friends had arrived. She hoped the Goddess would have answered her by the time Emma and Regina showed up and worried the magical being would not make an appearance this day.

"The whims of the gods are not for us to understand Gabrielle."

"But why father?"

"It is also not for us to question girl!"

The harsh words of her father echoed in her mind as the childhood memory faded from her. Her parents were devout to many of the gods, and her youth had been filled with prayer and offerings.

"Artemis I beg of you! Please!" The bard closed her eyes and started to get irritated because her time with Xena had taught her one thing. When you called for a god, that god heard you. Especially while praying in their temple! Ares showed up at the mere mention of his name, and it wasn't just when Xena called for him either. She had seen the dark god appear when both Hercules and Iolaus called as well. Perhaps it only works when the god has an attachment to the mortal. She thought ruefully.

The Amazons were treasured and valued above all else to the Goddess Artemis, but Gabrielle wasn't a real Amazon, she was adopted in, given the right of caste by chance and never really embraced the devotion to the Goddess herself. Perhaps that is why the immortal doesn't answer.
"Artemis! You owe me!" Gabrielle grumbled and then jumped when the Goddess appeared out of a shimmering golden light. "I owe you nothing child!" The auburn haired woman's features sneered, but her tone was the same monotone it always was. "The fact is I allow you to live. Do not take my benevolence for granted!" The Goddess stood proudly at her full height and watched as her ex-favored groveled at her feet.

"Of course, how silly of me to think you would consider returning a favor from your favored."

Icey blue eyes steeled and the being before her spat, "You have chosen to forsake your god mortal! Know this grievous error in judgment has not been overlooked."

"So you won't help me?"

The Goddess took a step closer, and Gabrielle felt the chill of the woman as she lowered her cold gaze to the bard's mossy green eyes. "You should be grateful I allow you to breathe after this. You were a Queen! My favored!" A cool hand cupped Gabrielle's cheek, "You were my love, but now you are nothing. Do not summon me again Gabrielle of Potedia, I may have an obligation to my brother to keep your precious princess alive, but I have no such obligation to you!"

Gabrielle sat back on her heels in stunned silence as the immortal vanished before her eyes. Xena was worried that perhaps the Goddess of the Amazons would be upset that Gabrielle gave up her throne and warned the bard not to mention why they needed to go to Mount Olympus in fear that the spiteful Goddess would alert her obsessed brother to their plans. They chose to trek to Artemis' temple before they decided to join Emma and Regina back to their homeland. Xena had good instincts and made a redundancy plan with Queen Ephiny for provisions and horses to make the journey deep into Cortese's territory and seek assistance from Aphrodite.

Gabrielle got to her feet and dusted off her knees and said a silent goodbye to the Goddess her people devoted themselves to and then with one last look; she went out to join her friends.

Xena stopped pacing and looked up hopefully when Gabrielle emerged from the temple. The bard shook her head a little telling her love of their failure. She stepped into the warrior princess' embrace and breathed her in. The confrontation with the Goddess of the hunt had shaken her, and the underlying threat had been heard loud and clear. Xena was right to be cautious.

"Alright!" Xena said to get Emma and Regina's attention, "Let's go back to the village." Regina looked to Emma who shrugged a little and got up from her place under a pine tree.

When the women reached the gate to the Amazon village, four horses were waiting for them, and Emma took the chance to pipe up, "Uh what's going on?"

Xena leaned in, patted the blonde Sheriff on the back and said, "Plan B." then helped the little bard mount the tall black steed before she mounted her horse. It was not Argo she mounted, and that fact did not get lost on the Sheriff as she looked at the pale speckled Appaloosa she was to mount. Regina leaned in and asked, "What's going on?"

Emma shrugged and repeated as covertly as Xena had said to her, "Plan B."

"What the hell does that mean?" the impatient Mayor harshly whispered and Emma shrugged again before she realized she had spent a great deal more time with the warrior princess than the Mayor knowingly had and knew Regina didn't particularly like surprises, so she added, "Something has probably gone wrong. Help me up on this thing would ya babe?"

The Mayor chuckled darkly, patted the Savior on her leathered butt and said, "Don't get used to
calling me *babe, Savior.*"

"Fine, help me up on this thing, would ya *beautiful?*" The Savior corrected with a wide smile and a wink.

Regina pursed her lips and considered it for a moment before nodding her agreement to the adjustment and helped the woman up into the saddle of her horse. Regina put a reassuring hand on both the thigh of the Savior and the well-muscled neck of the horse the blonde sat astride, settling both blondes in the same moment. She shushed the horse and stroked him gently, "It's okay baby she's not going to hurt you."

"Oh it's okay for you to call me baby but I can't call you babe? Double standard much?" The sheriff snarked. Without breaking eye contact with the animal she was settling, Regina said in a soothing voice, "I was speaking to your horse dear."

Xena called back to the pouting Savior and her doting Mayor, "Sunlight's burning troops!" Then set off on the trail away from the Amazon village. Regina mounted her chocolate appaloosa which was the exact opposite of the white horse that was Emma's and contemplated the visual irony of the white knight and the Evil Queen.

*She'll always be the Evil Queen, life never allows her happiness for long, and the darkness within her always won.*

Snow sat on the edge of the closed lid of her home's toilet and stared in shock at the blazing blue plus sign that stared right back at her. She and David had been actively trying to get pregnant until their daughter went missing, but after that, they all but stopped trying.

This can't be possible, was the first thought that went through her mind when she realized her cycle was late. She had other symptoms, sure, but a lot was going on, and she just hadn't paid it any mind. Until her very reliable, clockwork, never late cycle was suddenly *not.* She was balancing a new relationship, her marriage, caring for a preteen and now suddenly she felt the entire world slide off kilter.

She was of course happy, first and foremost. She knew David would be as well, but how did their extremely new dynamic fit into a life with an infant? She considered all of the things she knew about her girlfriend; She was loving and caring and so good with Henry, but has repeated time and time again she didn't want kids. Of course, this was before they started dating. In a scenario where Red would carry the fictitious child. She has always joked about not being grown up herself to have kids, or citing not wanting to ruin her figure, or the old standard not wanting to pass on her wolf genes. That was of course long before she had embraced her wolf and the Princess was uncertain if that was still a fear for her very new girlfriend.

Not that any of that mattered because Snow was pregnant. It wasn't biologically Red's, but this would affect her. She thought back to the conversation she had with her about giving David the opportunity to weigh in on big decisions she made for them all and she knew deep down, this was a big decision that had been already made long before there was anything official between herself and Red. She worried her lip and tucked the plastic stick deep in the garbage.

*Well, we are having a family meeting tonight anyway, what's one more topic to discuss?*

Ruby showed up at the Charming's apartment and cautiously knocked on the door. Since Emma went missing and then the consequential depression her girlfriend fell into, she'd been used to just
being able to walk into the apartment. Since she and Snow officially became official, she started to put some distance in the familiarity of her girlfriend's husband's home.

David wasn't just her girlfriend's husband, but he was also her friend. Yeah, they bickered and slung a little mud at one another in playful jest, but she cared about him. Not in a romantic way, but he was one of her oldest and dearest friends, and she didn't want to do anything that would hurt him. Of course she was ecstatic that Snow opened her heart up to her the way that she did, and she was concerned about what affect her dating his wife would have on their relationship. Not just Snow and David, but Ruby and David's friendship. So to be cautious she started putting up boundaries, even if it was only in her mind. One of those boundaries was not walking into the man's home like she owned the place.

So she knocked. David answered the door in his rugged I-can-do-it-all wardrobe which consisted of relaxed fit black jeans, a baby blue cotton button-up and his wife's pink frilly apron that said, "Kiss the Cook" written in bold red cursive across his chest. His questioning look easily relaxed, when he saw the visitor was Red, and he smiled wide and welcomed her in.

"Snow phoned and said she was running behind, so I started dinner for us," he informed as he went back into the kitchenette. He looked back toward Ruby as she hung up her leather jacket on the coat rack that was next to the door. "I hope spaghetti is okay," he added with a smile.

"Where's Henry?" she asked feeling a little uncomfortable, even if it was discomfort of her own making. This was the first time they've been alone with one another since she and Snow started seeing each other.

"Michael Tillman offered to take Nick and several of his friends camping this weekend," David said over his shoulder as he stirred the sauce for dinner.

"Oh?" Red asked only partially interested.

David rapped the wooden spoon on the edge of the steel pot and then covered it with the shiny chrome lid. He turned to Red and added, "Yes, it is Nicholas' birthday on Monday and Michael, being the proverbial woodsman, thought of no better way to celebrate his son finally becoming a young adult."

"Yeah, I guess so," Red distractedly said, and David noticed his friend was standing awkwardly in the center of the room.

"Hey, would you like some wine? I picked up the finest twenty dollars could buy," he asked with a teasing smile.

"Do you have beer?" She asked with visible hope.

"Nope."

"Wine it is then!" Ruby exclaimed.

Snow White trudged up the stairs toward the apartment she shared with her husband. She already decided she wanted them to move into a larger more permanent home. Several houses sat empty just on the outskirts of town. After the first curse broke, then the second cast by Pan, the little curse-let that was cast by her and her husband, and the one after Camelot, it is fairly ridiculous how many they've had to break, families reunited and re-reunited; the extra dwellings were just that, extra.
Since speaking to her girlfriend about moving in, she started looking for houses that met all of the adult's needs. She wanted David to have a large plot of land as he's mentioned, on more than one occasion, that he wanted to take in and care for animals that would get put down out at the animal shelter. Older or sick animals, David had a big heart and wanted to give them the respect they deserved, to live out their lives in a place that they would be happy.

She also wanted Ruby to live with them, and her young at heart girlfriend wouldn't be happy out in the middle of nowhere, so the house would need to be closer to town. She also wanted to encourage the woman to explore some of her natural artistic talents and imagined converting a space within their home where Red could thrive and live her art.

For herself, Snow was simple; she just wanted a vegetable garden and the love of her family close. With a little bit of effort and the help of the dwarves, she found a perfect place.

The house had a split level but was one unit. During the first curse, Grumpy initially resided on the ground floor while Happy occupied the top. They had shared accommodations which included the kitchen and living space. Snow mused that the intent was to make the two men as miserable as possible. Not that it was much of a stretch for one half of the odd couple.

It was, however, perfect for her needs. It wasn't too far out but backed onto a large piece of land which, with a little work, would be perfect for David's animal sanctuary. It was close enough to town that Red could still make it to work on time even when she hit snooze one too many times, and for Snow, there was already a tilled area for a garden.

The only problem was, she was now expecting. There were two extra rooms, one for Emma and one for Henry. The boy, under normal circumstances, was only with the Charming's every other week, but he was becoming a teenager and deserved his privacy while he was there. She worried how adding the addition to their family would cause issues with basically everyone involved.

"We'll just work it out," she said to herself as she entered the apartment. Her face brightened as she saw the two people she loved most in the entire world sitting on their couch watching some sports match on TV. She looked on for just a moment and knew this was how she wanted to come home every night. She just hoped this change she was about to drop on her family wouldn't blow up in her face.

"Honey's, I'm home!" she sing-songed when neither of her loves noticed she came in.

"Oh good!" David exclaimed with a smile, "Just in time, everything is ready to go!" He trotted over to the stove and popped the garlic bread into the oven to toast.

"Thank you, David," she said sincerely and pecked him on his cheek. She set down her purse and then leaned over the back of the couch and gave Red a peck as well. "Sorry I'm late," she apologized.

Red smiled and said, "We managed to keep ourselves busy."

"I see!" Snow said and pointed to the television. "You're watching half-naked men roll around on one another inside a cage, do I need to worry about you two?" She gave her girlfriend a wink and then went to go help her husband set the table.

"It's MMA. They are wrestling," Ruby informed.

Snow looked to David, and he explained, "Mixed Martial Arts, it is like jousting, but…"

"Naked?" Snow provided her husband help, and he smiled and agreed.
"Fine, yes, nude jousting," he relented with a chuckle.

Ruby joined them in the little dining area and added, "You should see the chicks fight, they are brutal!"

David's face lit up, "Women?! Red you've been holding out on me!"

"Sorry Charming I figured I'd start you off slow, you know, ease you into it," Red said as she took a seat at the foot of the table across from David.

"Slow? That guy's face looked like..."

"David," Snow cut him off before the description could get lodged in her head. She started experiencing morning sickness and didn't need any visual gore to help her be sick. Her husband looked at her sheepishly, and Red chuckled as she took a bite of her pasta dinner.

She watched as her girlfriend hummed her appreciation of the meal and her husband smiled wide just happy he seemed to have pleased the wolf. Snow felt her chest grow tight as she saw how they loved each other, as well as her and her emotions got the best of her, and she started to tear up.

Red noticed first as Snow held her hand to her lips trying desperately not to let out the sob that was climbing its way up her throat. She smiled wide when green eyes met green, and Ruby's smile melted into concern, "Hey are you okay?"

David followed Red's gaze and saw thick tears crest his wife's eyes that rolled down her crimson cheek. "Snow? What is it?"

"This is just so beautiful!" Snow squeaked out, her voice shrill with emotion.

David looked to Ruby, and they both burst out laughing.

"Awe!" the wolf cooed, "The fairest of them all caught feels!" Ruby shied away, laughing as Snow took a swing at her, a gruff pout where ugly crying had just been.

"Come on now Ruby. Snow just feels things on a deeper level, don't you honey?" He chuckled as he too dodged Snow's playful tap.

"No ganging up on me!" Snow exclaimed with a teasing pout as the beautiful moment had passed and she dug into her dinner.

They ate and laughed and felt like a family all together. Once dinner was finished Snow cleared the plates and started going over in her mind, which of the two items to discuss, was most important. She settled that if Ruby decides she can't or won't do this, then talking to them about a house won't matter.

**Baby first.**

Decided, she returned to the eating area and put her hands on the back of her chair and cleared her voice. The blond and the brunette both looked up at her expectantly.

"I'm pregnant," Snow blurted out, uncertain any other way would be any less shocking.

Smiles faded into simultaneous shock, and a set of blue eyes sparkled with a growing smile and a set of green looked anywhere but at Snow White.
"How, I mean, what?" David asked curiously.

"I'm almost at the end of my first trimester," she said, answering her husband's unasked question, then added, "I went to confirm it at the walk in this morning."

After a few seconds of holding her breath, Snow looked at her friend, now lover and said, "Red?" She swallowed hard in anticipation of the wolf's reaction.

Ruby held up a finger to Snow and locked eyes with Charming. She knew Snow was bringing up the house and her moving in and with this unexpected headline she needed to talk to David in a way they haven't since she started a relationship with his wife. "Hang on," she said and then pointed that finger at David. "Can we, just…" She got up from the table and tapped the man on the shoulder. "We'll be back Snow. Okay?" She said over her shoulder as she got her jacket and tossed the Prince his own.

Snow stood in a state of shock as she watched her lover and her husband rush out the door. "But?" She said to the closing door, "Family meeting…"
The pair sat on a couple of stools down at the Rabbit Hole, with a beer in each of their hands. "Cheap beer is worse than cheap wine," Charming commented and clinked his bottle to the base of the wolf's.

"Beer is not the point, we needed a bro break, and bro breaks require cheap beer."

David chuckled, "A bro break?"

"You're having a baby," Red said out loud. The words felt strange as they passed over her lips. Saying the words made it real to her and she looked at her friend in pure astonishment.

David broke into a wide smile and agreed, "Yes I am! Congratulations Auntie Ruby!" he added with a knowing wink.

Ruby stared at the man and realized that he was saying she was already an integral part of his family, even with a kid. She will be a part of that kid's life even if she and Snow were platonic friends; she would know this kid and love this kid. She watched as he told the balding little man behind the bar, "Hey I'm going to be a dad again!" His genuine smile was what caught her attention, and she stared at this impossible man.

"Charming?" Red said getting the blond's attention. "So you are really okay with all of this, us and Snow, and a baby?"

"Well yeah! From what Prince Thomas says diapers are constantly being changed. He asked once what was the point of giving her the bottle at all? Just pour the formula in the diaper and cut out the middleman!"

"Well, I'm sure some of it goes to good use," Ruby said and relaxed with a chuckle.

"Well an extra set of hands will be nice just the same," the man said then asked, "Is it stupid that I'm kinda looking forward to it?"

"It's not stupid," she said cautiously and understood the man missed it all with his first child. "but I will remind you that you said that six months in, when no one has had any sleep."

"I'm looking forward to that too," the blond admitted sheepishly.

"Ok well that's stupid," she teased, and he nodded his head and took a final swig from his beer. She finished hers as well and took the man by the shoulder and said, "She's going to suggest we get a house. All of us. I want you to know, this is something I want Charming, but I only want it if you want it." Her green eyes met blue, and she asked, "Do you want this life we are going to have together?"

"Honestly Red," he covered her hand with his, "I wouldn't want this life with anyone, but you."

She looked at him and wanted to tell him no homo on bro break, but the look on his face told her he was serious, so she held her tongue. "Alright well I'm sure the little woman is probably pissed we left like that and is climbing the walls, we better get home," she said, opting for serious instead of snark.

Charming stood up from the stool and laid down a five dollar bill and slapped the younger woman
on the back and whispered, "You better believe it. You broke it. You fix it."

"Wait what?" Red shook her head trying to comprehend what the blond just said to her.

He smiled as he started to walk away from the wolf. "Trust me when I say the next seven months are going to be interesting, get on her good side now."

Ruby got up from her seat and called after the chuckling man, "Charming? What do you mean, good side?"

"And here I thought you were afraid of horses Miss Swan," Regina said as she sat down next to the Savior.

The group made good time according to Xena, and they were afforded several hours rest for both the horses and themselves. They finished dinner and set up their camp for the night. The Queen sat close to the Savior but was mindful of any intimacy that was shown towards the blonde in front of the others. She's never been comfortable with overt displays of affection even if the displays were suddenly permissible. She felt clogged with emotion and as a result, resorted to old ways to cope.

"I was, I mean, I am," Emma corrected herself.

"Well, you were controlling him skillfully dear," the mayor praised. She slid a stray curl away from her face and tucked it behind her ear and tried not to notice the grime under her fingernails.

"Yeah, well, you know, you, uh... kinda taught me how."

"Oh," the brunette replied curtly, and Emma saw through the Queen's mask of indifference and noticed the jealousy just beneath the surface. Before she could comment Regina added, "It is rather off-putting to have, people, tell you things you've done and have no recollection of any of it."

"I can't imagine," Emma said sorrowfully. "Do you still ride? Like at home?"

Regina pulled herself away from darker thoughts and shook her head, "No."

"Why not?" Emma asked, she knew Storybrooke had stables available to the public, her father took their son and taught him how to ride.

"Honestly?" Regina asked uncertain if she herself wanted to divulge the truth of the matter aloud.

"Always," Emma said sincerely.

Brown eyes pinned to the ground and she explained in a hushed tone, "I lost Daniel twice, both times in the stables."

"Right. I'm sorry," Emma nodded in understanding and reached out and looped her pinky with the Mayor in silent support.

"I know. I've dealt with it the way I deal with things. Gratuitous avoidance." The Queen asked after a long contemplative silence, "Emma?"

"Yeah?"

"Tell me something I don't know about you."

"Like what?"
Regina huffed, "I don't know, something!" Thoughts of Daniel brought her mind to focus on all of the things this woman now knew about her life, intimate things no one knew about her. She wasn't exactly trying to level the playing field and didn't want Emma's deepest darkest secrets to be revealed, she just realized outside of Storybrooke she didn't know many details of the blonde's past. And she wanted to.

"Okay, well there's not much to tell. Um…"

"What was your earliest memory?" Regina suggested trying to get the Savior to focus.

"My early memories weren't really good Regina."

"Emma, you know things about me that no one alive knows."

Emma looked thoughtfully at the questioning woman and could see many emotions swirling in her eyes, so she decided to comply. "Um, okay, well when I was three the people who took me as an infant sent me back into the system. I remember flashes of that day, I mean I think they are memories. I was placed with a family, it wasn't one of the good ones," Emma trailed off, and it was Regina's turn to squeeze the Savior's pinky in silent support.

"I remember this raven the day I was placed. It was massive sitting on one of the telephone wires. It was squawking so loud I couldn't hear anything else. I remember the bird because I thought back to it often during my time with the Havisham's. I imagined that the raven knew it was a bad place and was trying to warn me. Stupid right?"

"Not at all. Ravens are said to hold great wisdom. There are legends in the Enchanted Forest that tell of the raven. It is said that the bird is a corporeal cover for ancient beings called the Watchers. They are omnipotent beings that are sent to watch over us."

"Well, that is seriously creepy! Is it a legend like the rest of fairytale land?"

"I believe it to be speculation told and retold by talented, imaginative bards, but I suppose anything is possible," she said looking over at two characters of one of her favorite tv shows come to life.

Emma's face pinched into a concerned frown as she considered the possibility that could be the truth, and was broken from her musings by another of the Queen's questions.

"How long were you there? At the foster home?"

"That one? Until I was six."

"Were you removed from the home?"

"No, they sent me back, they lied and said I was too much trouble."

"Not that a six-year-old can be trouble," Regina verbalized a watered down version of what she was thinking, then asked, "Why did they lie?"

"I don't know for sure, but I think I was getting to an age where if someone had asked me what happened to me, I would be able to verbalize it and would be believed. So they said I was hyperactive and disrupted the household."

"They hurt you?"

Emma nodded her head as she stared into the fire.
"I'm sorry that happened to you, Emma."

"I know you are," Emma soothed and broke her gaze with the fire and looked back towards her Queen, "I forgave you a long time ago Regina."

"I haven't forgiven myself," Regina shook her head to punctuate her feelings on the matter.

"I know, but you should."

"I don't think I can," the Queen admitted quietly.

"Everyone deserves forgiveness, especially when they ask for it."

Regina was silent as dark thoughts gripped her and contradicted the blonde.

"Holding onto that anger and disappointment you feel about yourself is only punishing you, it isn't doing anyone else a bit of good," Emma broke the silence between them and fought the urge to wrap the Queen up in her arms to try and soothe the woman's inner struggle, knowing it wouldn't help anyway.

"Maybe I feel I deserve to be punished," Regina said quietly.

"You have been your Majesty," Emma said looking over at the woman she loved trying to meet her gaze. "Life isn't a balanced scale. You don't offset your poor choices with punishment. You strive to be better, that is why you deserve forgiveness."

"It's called karma, Miss Swan and it is a bitch."

"It's called self-actualizing your destruction."

"Semantics," the Queen shrugged.

Emma wrapped her arm around the woman's lower back and pulled her in closer and whispered into her ear, "Good can come from broken. You are worthy of forgiveness."

Gabrielle was in self-reflection for most of the day as they rode toward Aphrodite's temple, but when they made camp, she finally noticed that Xena was on high alert. The dark woman had not been present and had answered questions posed to her by the rest of the group in either silent nods or simple grunts of acknowledgment.

The bard finished laying out their bed for the night and went to where the warrior was standing staring out into the darkness. As she came closer, the dark woman unsheathed her sword, and Gabrielle stopped dead in her tracks. She watched the warrior she loved dart out into the forest. She drew her sais and stood in a defensive stance ready for trouble. She looked back toward their guests and Emma reacted to the move by taking out her sword as well, and Regina stood closer to her Sheriff. The Queen was holding her bow but was not at the ready as she and Emma were.

The Mayor called over, "What happened?" The bard shook her head silently telling the brunette that she didn't know and also to be silent until they did.

Regina slowly leaned down and picked up the quiver at her feet and silently draped it over herself. The ease she felt as she drew an arrow from her back startled her, she hadn't picked up a weapon such as this in decades. She remembered buying the bow in the village, how it drew her attention.

*The familiarity of it.*
How it called to her.

Her breath caught as she realized the silence that surrounded her was not natural. She turned and looked to Emma, the look of concern and genuine fear was frozen on the blonde's features. The Queen whispered, "Emma?"

The blonde didn't move. She then noticed the fire was still and silent as well and her heart started to beat faster as panic set in, "Emma?" She reached out and grabbed the blonde's leather-covered arm, and she couldn't move her. She loaded her bow and muscle memory took control as she began to survey the area she could see within the camp.

A woman's voice startled her from behind, "Oh Gina baby, put that stick thrower away!"

Regina whipped around aiming the bow at the blonde intruder's heart. "What did you do to Emma?" Regina's question dripped with the threat her tone implied.

"Come on babe. We're cool with like the warrior babe and her battling bard! I really did like that by the way, that's like clever and stuff!"

Regina took in the pink lace and sheer panties the stranger was wearing and rolled her eyes at how painfully accurate the show had actually been, but she didn't let the being's looks disarm her. She felt the power the Goddess was exuding. She never felt anything like it, so she kept her guard up.

"What did you do to them?" She quickly darted her eyes to Gabrielle's frozen form then back to the Sheriff.

"Nothing major, so like, don't worry about it." The Goddess of love waved one alabaster hand in the Queen's direction, and her arrows disappeared, "We need to like talk or whatever!"

"Aphrodite I'm to presume?" Dark eyes followed the curly headed blonde as she made her way towards her Sheriff.

"It's a pleasure to meet me, Your Highness," the sassy Goddess drawled.

"I'm sure," Regina drawled right back. "What do you want?"

Aphrodite slipped her arm around Emma's shoulders, and in an instant the Sheriff was unfrozen, she dropped her sword and crashed into the embrace of the Goddess instantly. Regina gasped as she watched Emma passionately kiss the Goddess as she had done herself. Her strong arms flexed as she groped and pawed at the blonde god. In the brunette's mind, the tiniest little voice said, "I knew it was fake. The Savior could never love the Evil Queen."

In the blink of an eye the Savior was standing once again frozen, sword in hand, worry and fear etched across her face.

"That right there cutie pie, is what we need to talk about."

With shock, the Queen demanded, "What the hell was that?!"

"I am the Goddess of love sweet cheeks, and there are many, many kinds of love, I know them all." The Goddess caressed her way down the Savior's sculpted body, "Besides, you are messin with my mojo beautiful!"

"What?" Regina's eyes burned with jealousy as she watched the half-naked woman caress her… Emma. The Goddess sauntered over to the mayor and Regina could feel the glowing warmth of
power the closer she came. The blonde got right in the mayor's personal space, but Regina did not back down to this being. The curious blue eyes pitted with pleasure and took in every inch of her and Regina felt her heart thrum faster. The feel of the Goddess so close had Regina close to swooning, and a warm hand was felt on her cheek.

Her eyes rolled into the back of her head as images of her standing alone in the rain, headstones of the cemetery scattered all around her. The images flashed closer and closer, and the mayor in the vision was crying as she stood over the grave of Emma Swan. "These are valid fears chica," the being leaned in and brushed her pink lips against Regina's earlobe. As warm wet lips caressed her flesh, the mayor felt her center burn in her unnatural lust for the Goddess. "If you deny yourself this gift, you are self-fulfilling your fears."

Regina bit her bottom lip and tried to fight against what this being was making her feel. "You've wanted her for so long..." the being cooed and began to circle her, pressing her tight body against the bareness of Regina's arm and then back. A warm hand slid around her chest, and fingers found their way around Regina's neck and finally cradled her chin, pulling her up against the blonde sharply. The Mayor was frozen in magical desire she couldn't help but feel, turned on by every move the Goddess made. "Such a tragedy it would be to lose her, now, when you are so close to happily ever after!"

"I can't lose her!" Regina cried out feeling the panic under the induced lust she felt. The image of herself crying over the Savior's grave had been something the Queen had feared for a long, long time. First, it was fear that the woman's destiny would hurt their son, by his birth mother's early demise. Soon the fear took shape as the fondness for the blonde grew, where it was she who mourned the loss.

"I know babycakes. I know." The inhumanly strong hand gripped Regina's chin, and she was forced to look at the woman in question. "She is your true love. She is your destiny! Look at her," the immortal demanded.

"Love is a weakness," the brunette recited the one mantra of her mother's she agreed with. "She does stupid and impulsive things out of love, and it is going to get her killed!" the Queen sobbed as the truth of how she felt was pulled from her.

The Goddess of love's heated body pressed up against her and then suddenly thousands of images of her and Emma together, raced through her mind. Them with Henry, them with other children, them happy and in love on holidays and birthdays and regular days, all the different ways they manage to have a life together. The power of it made the brunette weak in the knees. "Love is strength, feel its power mortal!"

"I can't! I can't survive that heartbreak again!" Regina begged as she unnaturally remembered the loss of her first love.

The immortal circled the Mayor, and cool blue eyes pinned her in place, the strength of the being's magic was something Regina has never felt before, and she trembled in the woman's grasp. "Her fate will not be easy on you no matter which path you decide."

Aphrodite let go of the Queen, and she collapsed to the ground, her weight buckling her knees. "I can't like deal with you right now. Your negativity is bringing me way down."

Regina tucked away the raw feelings that had been ripped from her without her consent and got back to her feet. "How dare you!" Her inner Queen took over, and the bratty smirk she got in response angered her further. "Listen here whatever you are, what I choose to, or not to do, about
my Sheriff is none of your concern! We don't belong in this world and need to get home to our son, so are you going to help us or not?" Regina's body trembled in her natural fear and ultimate rage.

"Woo, I like you! You are one hot tamale!" the beautiful blonde wrinkled her nose and smiled wide showing her admiration of the little Queen. "But yeah, I need to check with my ex to see if you can actually do what you are going to have to do to get home." The being plucked a blonde hair from the Savior and a dark one from the Mayor and said, "I'll be back, toodles!" The Goddess giggled and blew a kiss as she disappeared in a cloud of pink sparkles.

Before Regina could register what was happening the Goddess was gone, and the world went back to normal time. The Savior and bard were still at attention, and both blondes were startled when Regina let out a loud exasperated, "Seriously?"

"Regina?!" Gabrielle exclaimed and then shushed her.

"I just met your Goddess of love!" Regina huffed with irritation as she bent down to pick up the bow she dropped when she fell.

"What?" Emma asked confused.

"She froze time or something, and we had a chit-chat," the Mayor replied ignoring the bard's daggers. "She is delightful," Regina added with sarcasm.

"When? Just now?" the Sheriff asked.

The mayor nodded her head. She focused on the Sheriff's eyes, the look of concern the woman held was real. It was genuine, that concern was for the Queen. "She said she would check to see if we can open a portal or not." Regina had her politician face on, and Emma took a step closer but didn't grasp the brunette the way she wanted to, knowing Regina would rebuff the sentiment.

Gabrielle moved toward her two companions and asked, "Aphrodite was here?"

"So she'll help us?" Emma said, relief evident in her tone.

Gabrielle looked concerned as well and said, "Okay well we'll celebrate when she comes back, but for now, Xena heard something or someone in the woods and went to go check it out, let's just be on alert, quietly."

Xena crouched down in the darkness and waited. The men who had been trailing them for the better part of the day didn't make her wait long to make themselves known.

A man's foot broke a dried stick in the distance, and she sprang into action. As she weaved through the thick brush, she heard the telltale whir of an arrow coming from the opposite direction. She stopped dead and caught it in her bare hand, simultaneously breaking it in half and letting her chakram fly into the dark. She continued to where the stick snapped and chuckled as she heard the groan of her target get cut down in the distance by the bladed weapon she threw.

A grunt sounded to her side, and she blocked the weapon strike with her gauntlet, parrying and slicing the attacker with skilled ease, killing him instantly. She plucked her chakram out of the air as it yo-yo'd back to her and knelt once again in the dark and listened. The leader of the band was skilled, but she was better. Dead leaves crunched, and she darted towards the sound in the dark.

Tree bark from a branch above her head was knocked loose by careless boots and Xena prepared herself for the attack from above. The assassin jumped from his place within the tree, and she
easily used his momentum to both disarm him and throw him to the ground in one graceful move. She jumped into action, and rigid fingers found pressure points in the man's neck and shoulder and the scarred features of the dark warrior contorted as he felt the paralyzing effect of the warrior princess' skill.

"I've just cut the flow of blood off to your brain. You'll die in 60 seconds if I don't release you," the dark woman informed then asked, "Why are you following us?"

"Lord Olseph commanded," the man sputtered and gasped for breath.

"I told Ares..." she started and he quickly corrected, "Ares didn't send us! Please, Xena, I'll tell you everything!"

With three quick jabs and a subtle twist, she resumed the man's lifeblood to his brain, but paralyzed his limbs and lifted a silent eyebrow goading the man to talk. Talk the man did; he laid out his commander's plan in painstaking detail, and Xena realized they no longer had time to waste. She needed to get them to the temple as soon as possible. As a stall tactic, she told the scout to deliver a message to his commander, "You tell Olseph, I don't want the job. He would be wise to reconsider his career choices as well. Now go!"

Her fingers skillfully struck pained flesh, and the man was released from her hold. He scurried back from her and got up and ran into the dark and Xena stood and closed her eyes to center herself then trudged back to camp to inform the others.

Xena listened to the dark Queen's watered down experience with the Goddess of love and felt relieved they would be getting help sooner rather than later. She already decided to move their little campsite up to high ground and was confident they could endure. She knew the area, and there was a cave system nearby that would work perfectly for their defendable needs. She was uncertain how long they would be out in the elements for and if she were Olseph, and she had been once upon a time, she wouldn't have sent one scout group out by itself. They needed to be defendable. At least until the Goddess of love could come through. Just before daylight broke, they had their camp packed up on the horses and headed out towards safety.

Gabrielle saddled up next to her warrior at the mouth of the cave when she was sure their guests were preoccupied with each other and asked, "You've been quiet."

"I've got a lot on my mind," the warrior said smoothly as she surveyed the cave opening and surrounding area for threats.

"I know," the bard said thoughtfully, "Just don't disappear."

Blue eyes turned and met a worried set of green, "Gabrielle, I'm here."

"Okay!" the short blonde exclaimed with a genuine smile. "She'll help us right? If she knows you and I are going too?"

"I'd like to think so."

"Yeah, but are we taking the chance?"

"Not if we don't have to," Xena said and looked into her lover's knowing eyes. "The fewer people who know the plan, the less likely you know who will find out about it."

"I know baby," Gabrielle leaned into her warrior, and Xena put her arm around her bard.
Chapter 43

Emma was helping Regina do busy work, the women were both stuck within their own heads for a better portion of the day as they waited for the Goddess of love and so they did what they could to pass the time in silence. Exhaustion crept into the blonde, her string of nights that provided little to no sleep was starting to catch up to her. The previous evening was spent lying still and listening to the forest. Every sound jolted her to attention, and her nerves were frazzled. The news that they were again in danger had the blonde worried and on edge.

To distract herself she tried to keep focused on what she was doing, but once the tasks had all been completed, she felt the silence, acutely. She needed to be distracted.

She sat down next to the brunette and asked, "How do you think the portal opened? I mean, isn't it like crazy rare?"

Regina shook her head and answered, "I don't know, I honestly didn't see it, I was just walking, and then I was falling."

"I know," Emma said solemnly, remembering the funnel cloud opening and seeing Regina just disappear.

"I don't know, but knowing the witless duo, they are probably all over it," Regina said and tentatively put a comforting hand on the Savior's knee. She could feel the unease grow within the Sheriff and knew that the woman was reaching her limit. They needed to get back in the woman's comfort zone, and relative safety of home and that needed to happen sooner rather than later.

"Led by Henry," Emma added and they both chuckled knowingly.

"Definitely led by Henry," Regina agreed and then there was a lull in the conversation and Emma could feel the walls of the cave start to close in a little, so she asked, "So what was the Goddess of love like?"

The brunette's body straightened up in her discomfort, "Aphrodite? Intense."

"Was she in sexy underwear?"

Emma smiled as Regina gaped, and the clinical Mayor took over and answered, "She was very pink."

The women sat in a long silence before the blonde felt uncomfortable again. "It's weird she just showed herself to you, isn't it?"

"What exactly are you suggesting Sheriff?" Regina's eyes narrowed in speculation.

"No... not... nothing! No, I just mean what is she up to? I don't trust them, I don't know what they are, but you and I know they aren't gods," the Savior chuckled to herself.

The Mayor deadpanned, "What is a god, Emma?"

"What?"

"What classifies a being, godly?" The brunette challenged, "Powerful? Immortal? Has greater knowledge of time and space? What? What is godly enough for you?"
"Regina, they're not gods. Gold is all of those things and he sure as hell isn't a god!" Emma said astounded the Mayor would even entertain the idea of their god-ness. The Mayor leveled a look on the Savior, and the blonde lost her snarky tone almost immediately. "Okay. What happened?"

The brunette dropped her gaze to her own lap and made a motion to dust herself off realizing it was a futile attempt as she was head to toe, filthy. They both were, and she considered the shower she would have when they got home.

To Henry. And the Charmings. What if the idiots talk some sense into her?

If not that, it will be something.

The brunette cleared her throat and said, "I was helpless, and I'm not accustomed to feeling helplessness, so I don't necessarily wish to discuss it. Let's just say whatever they are, they make the dark one look like a child's birthday party magician."

"All the more reason I don't trust them," Emma huffed and after a moment added, "I'm... I mean, I'm not accustomed to feeling helpless either, I don't think anyone is. Being rendered that way doesn't make you a weak person."

"Sheriff..." the Queen warned and Emma backed down with a silent raise of her palms in surrender.

They quietly sat and watched the fire for several more moments before Emma added, "Just saying."

"Emma!" the Queen's voice echoed out in the cave and she whirled around, her eyes ablaze with warning. A blaze that was immediately doused when Emma snickered.

"Miss Swan! I am dirty and tired, and I smell like horse. I am in no mood for your juvenile teasing!"

Emma busted out laughing and then whispered to the brunette, "That's the best time to tease you."

She stopped laughing when the Mayor's face schooled itself into the Evil Queen, and the brunette leaned in and hissed, "When it comes to teasing Sheriff, you'll find I too, am skilled."

"I see what you're doing there and... it's completely working," Emma said as she focused on the woman's lips.

"Good," the Queen cooed in vindication.

Snow was pacing the kitchenette going over in her mind how she lost control of their evening. Had she misread her girlfriend so much that the woman needed to leave the premises? She envisioned many different responses, but what had actually occurred, that surprised her. She worked herself up to a frenzy by the time her better halves waltzed back into the house. When they did, she immediately jumped to the offense, "Where the heck did you go!? You don't just walk out in the middle of a conversation! It's rude!"

David held his hands up and announced he was surrendering as he took off his jacket. Red spoke up, "Coward." She smirked at the man and then became serious as she turned her focus to her girlfriend's look of worry and concern. "I needed to know how Charming felt before I could choose a way to feel about this."

"And?" Snow said looking between the blond and brunette.
Red smiled first and pulled her princess into a tight embrace and exclaimed, "Congratulations! We're having a baby!" She felt the stress in the shorter woman melt away as she collapsed into the hug.

She quickly realized the brunette was crying and her green eyes looked up to Charming who shook his head and held up seven fingers as he mouthed, "Seven months."

"Are you two ganging up on me again?" the normally pale complexion of the princess was bright red in her upset. She pulled away from the wolf and collapsed in the arms of her husband and whined, "Charming!"

The man wrapped his arms around his wife and said, "We're having a baby!"

"I want to do this David. All of it, the baby and us, oh and Emma!" She pulled away and said with astonishment, "Emma's going to be a big sister!" She looked into the blue eyes of her husband, "Oh David we can't make her feel replaced…"

"We won't Snow!" The man gently assured, "She is going to be as happy about this as we are!"

"I know, of course, she will David, I just don't want for one second for her to feel pushed aside or unwanted." The princess's face pulled upset once again, and her husband consoled her. He looked up to Red, and they shared a knowing smile.

Xena's ears twitched as she heard the sound of slow, deliberate footsteps off in the distance. She pulled the sword from her back and said in a low voice to her bard, "We've got company." As the bard ducked behind the warrior to pick up her staff weapon she called to their comrades, "Trouble!"

Emma's face paled as she watched the Mayor arm herself with her bow and scurry over to where the warrior princess was shielding herself behind the lip of the cave. "Regina!" Emma called then grabbed her sword and ran up behind Gabrielle on the opposite side of the cave. She watched her love as she knelt next to the warrior princess and drew her bow skillfully and waited.

Xena pointed, and Regina let her arrow fly, and after the whirring sound of the arrow cutting through air, a man's voice was heard from the thick brush. Xena pointed several more places, and Regina cut down the unseen men. She didn't hit every target, but it was still impressive.

Once the Mayor was out of arrows, Xena pulled her to the side of the cave. Seconds after she did, several arrows whizzed in through the large opening and hit the far wall of rock.

"How many of them are there?" Gabrielle asked her lover.

"Not as many as they came with," Xena said distractedly. She unhooked her chakram and bounced it off the one warrior dumb enough to breach the relative safety of the brush.

Emma felt her chest grip tight, and she was finding it hard to breathe. The stresses this world coupled with no rest caused the Savior to panic a little. "What do we do just wait them out?"

Emma exclaimed, and Regina made a move to cross the opening to comfort the blonde but was held back by Xena.

Gabrielle met eyes with her love then took a soothing tone with the Sheriff and said, "We are not trapped in this cave Emma." She pointed to the rear of the cave and said with a steady, soothing tone, "If we have to, we can escape, but for the moment we have the advantage." The former Queen focused the Sheriff's attention and pointed to the large area outside the cave devoid of cover, "You see, they have to cross that expanse in order to reach us, leaving them open to being
The blonde nodded her head nervously and said, "Hallway hero. I get it. Okay." She gripped her sword and calmed herself down. The area of the cave started to feel bigger than it had been just moments before and her eyes met the Mayor's, and she gave the worried woman a little smile.

Regina felt an unnatural warmth stir within her and saw the blank stare her lover was frozen still in time. She heard the eerie stillness of the world and spoke up, "Are you going to help us?"

A light pink teddy, covering what little it did, made itself visible against the dark rock of the back of the cave. "You are all work work work! Can't a Goddess just drop in and like, say hello or whatever before we get down to business?"

The no-nonsense Mayor deadpanned, "No. Unfreeze them," she pointed to her lover and their two friends.

"You're no fun your royal bitchiness."

"Unfreeze them," the Queen demanded as she looked to see a warrior frozen in the brush and she tentatively scooted across the cave entrance to stand next to Emma.

Aphrodite sauntered closer and traced her fingertips along Emma's bare arm. The Queen bared her teeth and hissed, "Stay away from her!"

The blonde Goddess pouted, "You really are no fun today Your Majesty! Have you given thought to our little talk babe?"

Regina whirled around on the Goddess and spat, "I've already told you what I do with my Sheriff is none of your concern!"

Regina's features darkened as she regained control of herself and she shouted, "Unfreeze them, NOW!"

The Sheriff was startled when suddenly Regina was right next to her. She looked up to see a beautiful blue-eyed blonde in trashy underwear standing next to them. The being emitted a glow that lit up the entire area.

Xena deadpanned, "Aphrodite." The being ran over to where the tall leather clad woman stood and kissed the air on each side of Xena's cheeks then turned to Regina, "Happy?"

"Ecstatic," the Mayor said flatly as she snaked a protective arm around the Savior.

"That's?" Emma looked on in amazement, no matter how many magical things happen around Emma, or to Emma, she is always fascinated for a few moments before she returns to reality. Remnants of growing up in a magicless realm.

The little Goddess left the tall warrior and draped an arm around Gabrielle. "Isn't she delicious Gabby?" The large blue eyes took their time eyeing up the Sheriff. "She is... athletic! Em-ma," the
magical being cooed seductively.

Emma felt the stirrings of arousal, and she backed away from Gabrielle and the Goddess and said, "She's a little rapey."

"Aphrodite," Xena warned, and the Goddess smiled wide and said, "I bet she tastes great, Hmm I can smell your true love essence in the air!"

Regina moved between the Goddess and her love, her threat clear in her glare.

"Okay, a lot rapey, Xena?" Emma called to the woman who seemed perfectly calm standing up to the Goddess.

Xena put her hand on her hip and asked, "Aphrodite are you going to help or what?"

"Careful warrior princess, I know what you're planning and if I've figured it out…" she teased with a maniacal grin.

"Yes or no?" Xena looked toward the Goddess as if she were bored.

"Fine!" the Goddess huffed and magicked them to the center of an open stadium. The clay beneath their feet had a dusting of rose-colored sand, and their voices echoed against the empty seats that encircled the playing field. The white marble was polished to a shine and almost had a glow of its own as it reflected the setting sun and lit up the entire stadium. The Goddess marched over to Emma and handed her a palm-sized piece of obsidian. "I love a natural blonde!" She looked over towards Regina and added, "And such a good kisser too."

Emma saw the Mayor's move to conjure a fireball and pulled herself from the Goddess's grip so she could stand between the magical being and her lover. The Goddess rolled her eyes at the pettiness of mortals, "Whatever. Hermes said that piece of glass would guide you," she pointed to the Savior and continued, "but you have to guide them."

The Sheriff turned to look at the Mayor, "You got this?"

"Emma, I can't reach my magic," Regina replied with worry, still trying to conjure a fireball in her hand. Emma slipped her fingers into the Queen's free hand as soon as they touched the Mayor felt the warmth that was her magic deep within her. She reached within, and as if the tiny ember of magic were fanned, it ignited within her.

"Woo!" Aphrodite squealed, in awe of the Savior, "You are powerful little one!"

Gabrielle clasped her lover's hand and said to the Goddess, "Thank you for helping us."

The Goddess said with a wink, "You take care of little miss grumpy Queen and her Savior sidekick now, you hear?"

"Emma," the Queen said in a hushed tone, "clear your mind, let me take control of your magic." A bright white light shone out from where their hands were joined, and Regina circled her free hand and cast the spell she needed to open the portal. The ground behind the group of women pulled into a cloudy vortex. A sparkling green light shone out from the vortex and basked the arena in a ghostly green hue. Regina reached out her hand to the warrior princess and gave the nod to Emma that they were ready.

As soon as Emma held the image of her son in her mind's eye, the piece of glass in her hand, and her eyes, pulsed with blinding white light.
Chapter 44

The god of war paced the great hall of his castle, his agitation palpable in his restlessness. He was going over and over in his mind all the ways he had offered the world to his favored, and he couldn't understand why she was not complying!

All I have done I have done for her! I am a god, I move the stars and provide her destiny, and yet she still denies me! All I want is her unshakable devotion!

"Ares!" His name boomed within his skull, and he winced at the only pain an immortal could feel.

"I'm a little busy!" he grumbled as he gripped the edge of the long oak table.

The voice pierced through his consciousness once again, and the god squeezed his eyes tight against the pain of the summoning, "You will hear me now, brother!"

After a few moments of his rebellion, she materialized before him in golden glory.

"Artemis, do make yourself at home."

The Goddess commanded with a sneer, "Call off your dogs, your bitch and her brat are no longer in Amazon territory!"

"What on Olympus are you talking about?"

Artemis took a step closer; menace etched across her features, "Get. Your army. Out."

The god of war summoned the memories of his dimwit mortal and commander of his army then sneered at his sister. "Apparently your bitches have their hands full." He chuckles as she broods and adds, "My warrior princess will come to her senses when every Amazon warrior is dead!"

"Are you obstinate as well as deficient? My warrior women do not pose you any threat, Ares! The brat has resigned her throne. If you continue, I will unleash hades upon you, and you will be known as Ares, the former god of war."

Hope crossed the dark eyes of the god of war for only a second before the gloating of his sister echoed out in the stone room. Her laugh, if you could call it a laugh, boomed as the volume increased in the Goddess's mirth. She waved her hand, and the sound was sucked from the room, and she said, "You're pathetic. You have no idea what that mortal is up to! She lies to you, Ares. She treats you like a child, telling you things only a child could understand! She is up to something and is looking for a god's assistance, and if she didn't summon you," The flat blue eyes hooded and the muscles in the Goddess's jaw clenched, "Then she will seek out our sister."

The dark god stewed in his anger at the audacity of Artemis but knew she was right. If Xena is keeping things from him, she is doing so purposefully. What is she planning?

He waved his hand and threw a fireball at his auburn haired sister, and she easily blocked the half-hearted attempt to harm her. "I will leave you to your brooding little brother." Her mouth turned up into a satisfied grimace. "Don't make me wipe out your precious army Ares it is your only lure."

The man erupted in his rage as his sister disappeared into thin air. He roared his frustration and flipped over the heavy oak table that was set for a king's feast. The plates and food scattered to the marble floor. He raked one hand through his curly black hair and focused his powers on the
Goddess of love and transported himself to her location.

As he oriented himself in the center of the Colosseum, he watched as his love jumped into a hole in the center of a whirling cloud of light and then the light, and his mortal was gone. He looked up at his sister and roared, "WHERE IS SHE!!?"

"Dude, seriously? Take it down a notch okay?" The blonde Goddess huffed in annoyance.

He rushed the little blonde and slammed her up against the fall wall of the stadium. Her petite body cracked the marble with his force, and he barked, "Tell me where she is! NOW!"

"Sorry little brother, I told you years ago, her heart never belonged to you."

He spat as his rage overflowed his sense, "Who's fault is that?"

"Talk to the fates bro, not my department! Now get your callously hands off my chiffon!"

"I demand to know where she went!"

"Wherever those little cutie petutie strangers are from!"

The god of war seethed, the level of his patience spelled clearly in his tone, "What strangers?"

"Em-ma and Gina! Super cute couple," she gushed, and Ares threw her back away from him as if she were insignificant. He began to pace as he mulled over what little information his sister gave him.

"She's gone, Ares. It's time to move on."

"We'll see about that," he grumbled then disappeared in cool smoke.

The group of women were tossed out of a purple and green whirling cloud, and all of them grunted in pain as they hit the floor of the forest. Regina sat up and looked around in a bit of a daze, she held her hand to the side of her head and wasn't at all surprised when she pulled away and saw blood. Her injury was forgotten when she noticed the all too still form of her love laying face down a little ways away from her. She scrambled over to her and grabbed at the blonde's lithe form and frantically called the woman's name, "Emma!" In her worry, all sense left her, and she shook the Sheriff to try and rouse her.

The tall brunette warrior knelt down next to the Savior, she noted the woman's bloodied nose and felt her pulse point. "She's alive. She seems to be in a restorative sleep."

Regina was startled by the woman's calm voice then wiped the tear that escaped and pulled herself together. "Magic," she said aloud, her logical side took over, and she pieced together what the Savior's unconscious form could mean. "It took a lot of magic to create that portal." Her dark eyes started to survey the area, and she orientated herself. "She just needs to rest. She'll be okay," she said in a low tone mostly trying to convince herself.

She looked up when Gabrielle came over to where they were and said, "It is much cooler in your world than ours."

Regina focused herself inward and wasn't surprised she couldn't feel her magic. She got to her feet and replied dryly, "Yeah, welcome to Maine. We aren't far from town, and I seem to be tapped out on magic so we'll be walking."
Xena took that as a cue to move and lifted the unconscious blonde up and over her shoulder.

Regina sighed when she saw that the Savior's rusted out bug was not where they left it outside of the mines and then directed the group passed the mine entrance and towards town.

The Sheriff regained consciousness as they hit the outskirts of town and Regina felt herself exhale in her relief. "Are you alright dear?" she asked as Xena set down the Savior and Emma flashed her a little smile then replied, "Are you?" She lifted her hand to the Queen's apparent abrasion, and the brunette nodded.

The women looked to Gabrielle when the bard pointed and asked, "What's that?"

"That's an automobile," Regina answered.

"An ah-toe-mo-beel," the bard repeated in wonder.

"It's like a horse-drawn carriage, you know, without the horse," Emma supplied and got slowly to her feet. She was feeling drained, but much more herself now that she was on her home turf and the anxiety and stresses that she felt in the Xenaverse started to fade away from her.

"Without a horse?" Xena's amazement was unmasked in her question.

"It moves on its own with the help of a combustion engine," Regina supplied. Gabrielle looked on in her astonishment and said absently, "By the gods-"

"Technically by General Motors," Emma quipped, then said, "There's a lot that is different in this world."

"Evidently," the warrior replied and wrapped a protective arm around her curious bard.

Henry Mills was sitting at a booth with his grandmother at the back of Granny's. They were waiting for Red to get off of her afternoon shift because they had plans, to make plans, for a welcome home party for his moms. It had been some time since they sent the care package to his moms and he felt his grandma start to lose hope again. It was his idea to start planning a party to lift her spirits, and both Snow and Red seemed like they thought it was a good idea.

He was looking over the menu and was considering a burg-lette as an after school but pre-dinner snack. He was a growing boy after all and was positively famished.

The bell chimed and he, as many did, looked up. His brunette mother walked into the establishment dressed in a tiny leather outfit. She and it were filthy. He only noticed the mess because from what he knew of his adoptive mother, she loathed anything disorderly. His joy painted across his face, and he exclaimed, "Mom!" He got up from the table and ran full tilt towards his mother. In the flash of a second, he was his ten-year-old self again, and he almost knocked her over because he was actually, no longer ten. He had a growth spurt while his parents were missing and now almost looked his mother in the eye.

"Henry?!" she exclaimed and grabbed him up in her arms. "Darling!"

"Kid!" his birth mother greeted and grabbed both him and his adoptive mother in a giant bear hug.

"Emma!" The Savior heard Snow White and kissed Henry who was still wrapped up in Regina's arms, then pulled away to greet her mom.
The bell at the door jingled as Xena flicked it as she walked by. "Um, Emma?" Snow cautiously questioned as the taller than average, powerful, warrior loomed over them.

Granny lifted her crossbow from behind the counter and held it with an unsaid threat.

"Oh!" Emma exclaimed as she saw the tip of the thick bolt at the end of granny's crossbow and let go of her mother and positioned herself between the threat and the warrior princess and said, "Hey! It's okay this is Xena and Gabrielle."

Granny set the bow down and humphed, "I prefer to be the only one armed in my diner."

"Guys, this is uh... my mom, Snow White."

"Xena, like the warrior princess?" Snow asked with amazement, her eyes wide taking in the tall, raven-haired woman.

"Wow, the Snow White!" Gabrielle said with a smile, amazed in her own right. "Your story is favored amongst our bards."

Xena asked, "Do you really live with seven midgets?"

"Hey watch it, sister!" Grumpy huffed at a nearby table. The warrior princess sneered, "Or what?"

Emma held up her hand and nervously said, "Xena the people that live here are all like us. Displaced from their world, you know? So let's all just relax?"

"Also the real stories differ significantly," Snow added helpfully. "I mean I'm sure you weren't a bloodthirsty warlord that conquered half of the known world, right?"

"Actually, yes. I was." Xena lifted an eyebrow and Gabrielle pushed her warrior a little bit and amended, "I'm sure you weren't as bloodthirsty as they think sweetheart."

Emma heard her name exclaimed and then turned to see Ruby rushing from the other side of the diner. "Oh my god! Swan! Are you okay?" Emma embraced the wolf and grumbled, "In desperate need of a shower, but yeah."

"I second that," Regina drawled, and Emma blushed a little and then jested, "Hey you said it wasn't that bad!"

"No, Swan, you totally smell like a foot," Red said.

Henry agreed with a chuckle, "Yeah you both do."

"Henry! I do not smell like a foot!" Regina complained at the chuckling boy.

"Well do your friends need a room?" Granny gruffed behind the counter wanting to move the welcome wagon out of the middle of her diner.

"No they'll stay with me," Regina announced in her mayorial tone.

"Okay," Snow said to Emma, "Come on, let's get you a shower, your dad is going to be so happy you're back." She looked in Regina's direction and amended, "That you're both back." She smiled at Regina's discomfort and then said to Henry, "You've got your homework right? You're going with your mother, Henry?"
Regina clutched him and said, "He's coming home with me."

"That's what I said," Snow said flippantly then focused on the boy and asked, "Your words for your spelling test are in your bag, right?"

"Yes grandma," the boy said.

"Good. I'll see you at school tomorrow," she pulled him in and kissed him on the head and said her goodnights to him. As she pulled away she was stopped by the Queen's hand, and brown eyes met green, and the Queen said, "Thank you for taking care of him."

"Thank you for taking care of her." They shared an unspoken moment where their past didn't matter, and they were both just a mother concerned about their child. The moment was broken when one of the children pulled at Regina's arm and asked, "Can I talk to you a minute?"

Regina kissed her son once again and instructed "Get your school work darling," then followed the Savior just out of earshot and looked at her with concern.

"How is this gonna work?" Emma asked the open-ended question, and Regina saw a look in the Savior's green eyes, it was a combination of worry and concern, uncertainty and fear. For the first time, she realized Emma shared her own fear of being left, forgotten, and discarded.

"Darling, tonight I'm going to spend some time with our son, and you are going to spend time with your parents."

"Okay," Emma nodded but Regina saw the panic creep in so she put her hand on the Savior's arm and said, "And tomorrow morning you are going to come and have breakfast with us, and we'll talk about logistics."

"Logistics," Emma repeated and looked down, but Regina grabbed her chin and forced their eyes to meet. "Yes dear, the logistics of how we are going to make us work, okay?" Satisfied the blonde wouldn't break her eye contact Regina placed a soothing hand on her upper shoulder and added, "I think it's important you stay with your parents tonight, Swan. We have time remember?"

Looking less like a forgotten puppy and more like a petulant teen Emma said, "Yeah, I guess."

"That's my girl," the Mayor said with a knowing smirk.

"Red said she'll drive us home mom," Henry said not knowing he was breaking a moment between his mothers. Emma reached out to the boy and wrapped her arms around him and kissed his head. He whined a little and exclaimed, "Yuck, now I smell like a foot!"

Snow White bound up the stairs towards her husband. She called into the apartment, "Charming?!"
The blond man greeted his wife from their back bedroom, "Snow? I thought you were planning..."

"She's home!" Snow cut him off and dragged their daughter into the apartment after her.

"Emma!" David cried and rushed to his daughter and picked her up in a giant bear hug.

"Okay... Alright..." she struggled in his embrace, and when Snow crashed into them she relaxed and let out a huff, "Okay. Everyone is good."

"Oh thank the gods!" he exclaimed and tried to hold back the emotion he felt standing holding his firstborn in his arms.
"Well, you can thank one of them anyway."

"What?" he said and pulled her back.

"Aphrodite. It's a long story. I need a shower."

"Yeah, you do!" Snow cried through her own emotion, unable to hold it in like her husband.

Once they got a shortened version of what happened to her, they let her go wash up. She made her way down the stairs, clean and in the softest pajamas she owned. She opened the refrigerator and pulled out the half gallon of milk and took a swig from the bottle.

"Honey we own glasses," Snow softly scolded when Emma put the lid back on and put it back into the refrigerator.

"Yeah, I just wanted a mouthful, not a whole glass." She looked at her parents who were both smiling in that way they did when she broke the first curse, so she grabbed an apple and sat down next to her father at the counter and said before taking a bite, "So what I miss?"

"We're pregnant!" Her father blurted out at the same time Snow said, "We're moving!"

"Wow. Okay, I meant with the town, but..."

Snow circled the kitchen counter and said, "We may be having another baby, but you will always be our first born sweetheart."

"Um okay..." her green eyes were wide as she took in this information, but she had a hell of a day and just wanted to focus on stuff that didn't make her feel so she took another big bite of her apple. "So we fell through a portal..."

"There have been more than one," her father said solemnly.

"Okay, did you figure out why yet?" Emma asked with her mouth full of juicy apple.

"We think it's the curse," her mother said and let go of her, seemingly understanding her daughter wasn't ready to discuss being a big sister.

"Which one?" Emma asked and rolled her eyes at the fact she had to be specific.

"The first one. We don't think you broke it," Snow replied.

"Hey, yeah I did! I kissed Henry, rainbow surge, kid not dead, memories back, the curse broke. I totally Savior'd it up!" Emma said in disbelief.

"Evidently not all the way," her father said and wrapped his arm around his wife.

Emma scrunched up her nose and said, "Crap. Okay, how do you know?"

"Mr. Gold," Snow said cautiously.

"Did he happen to tell you how I can break it, all the way?" She used air quotes for the words all the way and then took another bite of her apple.

"He said true loves kiss of a romantic variety, will break the curse and defeat the Evil Queen," her father recalled dutifully.
Emma perked up and asked, "Wait, defeat Regina? How?"

"You find your true love and kiss him," her mother supplied.

"I mean, if I have a true love and kiss them, what happens to Regina?" Emma plainly stated what was troubling her.

"Oh, I'm uncertain, sweetheart, he just said defeat her," Snow said looking to her husband for help.

"Yeah, defeat her how, she doesn't need defeating!" She said with worry, "I need to talk to Henry." She considered then asked, "Where's my bug, the kid has his book up at Regina's right?"

Her parents shared a look, and she asked, "What?" Then her father carefully told her what happened to her car.
Ruby pulled her mustang up in front of Granny's diner and revved the engine. When she did both Xena, and Gabrielle took a step back from the loud throaty machine. Regina put her hand on the small of the warrior princess's back and said, "Trust me, you are safe."

"It's really loud!" Gabrielle shouted with her fingers in her ears.

All three of them jumped when Red's stereo suddenly came to life at a deafening decibel, and Xena instinctively drew her sword. Regina marched over to the side of the red vehicle and slapped the metal paneling and shouted, "Miss Lucas! Our guests do not have the luxury of having cursed memories, do you mind not scaring them half to death with your terrible 80's hair band music!?!"

"It's Metallica! It's heavy metal, not hair band Regina!"

"Is that really the point, Miss Lucas?"

Satisfied the puppy was sufficiently scolded and visibly remorseful, Regina took a deep calming breath then turned back to her guests. "Henry you're in back with Gabrielle and myself, Xena you can sit in the front since you are 90% leg."

Once everyone was inside the vehicle, Regina said, "Miss Lucas, please do drive carefully."

"I always drive carefully!" Red replied with a wide wicked smile. Regina sighed and then took hold of the grab handle above her.

Ruby snickered at the Queen's discomfort and revved the engine one more time before slowly pulling out onto the main drag of Storybrooke.

After slowly, and consequently, safely, arriving at 108 Mifflin Street, Henry helped Gabrielle out of the back of the Mustang's back seat then said his thanks and good night's to Ruby. The leggy brunette was gently needling his mother in true Ruby Lucas fashion, but he eventually got her attention and crashed into her with a bear hug. "Thank you for helping getting them back for me," he said in a low voice.

"I didn't do anything kid."

"You believed when I needed someone to believe they would be okay," he replied, emotion thick in his adolescent voice.

Ruby pulled him back and then looked up toward his mother and said, "I just know how stubborn your mom is Henry, I knew she'd never stop trying to find a way back to you." She tousled his hair and added, "Both of them."

He chuckled knowingly then joined his mother and their guests and entered his home.

Regina opened the door to her home using her son's keys, and she heard Gabrielle say, "This place is like a castle!"

"Not quite, but I do own one," the Mayor quipped and chuckled. She recognized the guarded look in the warrior princess' eyes as she looked back. She turned on the light in the foyer and ushered her guests into her home. She remembered how strange everything was when she first came to this land herself, even though she had false memories just like everyone else, she also had her
Enchanted Forest memories and was marveled by every little thing she saw. Dark eyes looked up and caught guarded blue, and she turned and explained the lighting, "These little switches turn on the lights. Every room has a set, and they are found near entryways."

"How?" Gabrielle's more open curiosity wanted to soak up all of the new and amazing things in this new world, but Regina focused on Xena, who, like herself, was not accustomed to feeling out of control.

"Think of it as a flint to a fire." She flicked the light off then back on then grabbed Xena's hand when the tall warrior flinched. She brought Xena's hand to the light switch and said, "It's called electricity. It is the main power source here in this world and can do many astonishing things."

"Mom! Can we order pizza? Everything in the fridge is bad."

"Peet Zah?" Gabrielle said absently and slid her hand along the flat white wall of the foyer.

"Yes, darling," she called to him then said to her guests, "Come, let me show you two to your room and more importantly show you what a shower is."

"Oh Xena isn't it magical? Feel this fuzzy floor! You could sleep on it! Oh and the bath-room! Warm water that sprinkles down on you anytime you want! Oh and no more using my scrolls as..."

"Yeah it's great," the warrior princess said with nowhere near the jubilation her counterpart was exuding, and the bard took notice.

"Xena!" she said and then tucked her rampant curiosity away and tried to look at this world through her warrior's eyes. "I'm sorry, it's just..."

"No I know, it's just far more strange than I imagined it would be," blue eyes rolled when she saw her lover look at her knowingly.

"I know baby," Gabrielle said and willfully pulled in her own excitement. "Hey look, Regina said there are stables outside of town, why don't we go up there tomorrow and have a look around." She caressed the warrior's cheek and added, "And if you want we can probably make camp, Henry said there are woods that surround the town."

"You'd camp with me?" Xena asked with a little pout.

"Of course baby, you're my priority." The bard smiled knowing it would take her warrior a little longer to accept this new world, this new life they were going to have. She wrapped her arms around her leather clad warrior and said, "I love you, Xena."

Strong arms encircled her, and the warrior mumbled, "I love you too, my Queen."

"Seriously? My bug?! Oh man!" Her attention was detoured as she mourned the loss of an era.

"We're sorry, sweetheart, it was the first thing we noticed missing, we still thought you two were in a cave-in at that point."

The Savior pulled herself out of her mourning and said, "You thought we were dead?" She looked between them and saw the heavy mark on both of them, somewhere inside them, they thought she had died.
"Red believed you were okay," David said.

"And Henry," Snow added.

"I'm sorry guys." She felt a little guilty because she hadn't fallen into the portal, she jumped. She hadn't given a thought to Snow or David when she did. She honestly just reacted. "Okay well, how many more portals have opened up?"

Her father gave her, for all intents and purposes, a sheriffing rundown on the portal issue and the curse break down in general and Emma stood and started to pace and think.

"Alright, first things first," she said and grabbed her mom's cell phone off the counter and dialed Henry's phone.

"Hey kid it's Emma."

"Oh hi mom," he greeted with an audible smile.

"Uh, you have your book at your mom's or here at the apartment?"

"I've got it here at mom's."

"Okay, uh what does it say about the Savior breaking the dark curse?"

"The one Mom cast?"

She rolled her eyes a little at how many they'd had to break and said, "Yeah that one."

"Oh, um hang on," she heard his sneakers squeak against the tile of the hallway and then Regina's muffled voice and Henry said, "No it's Emma."

"Go wash your hands for dinner," Regina said then asked Emma through her son's phone, "What's wrong?"

"Wrong? Why would you think something is wrong?"

"Dear, it's Storybrooke."

"Nothing, well… nothing immediate."

Regina took in a deep breath and said, "Spill it, Swan."

"There are portals that open randomly all over town, and one of them swallowed my bug and Gold said I didn't break your curse but if I do I will defeat you, and I don't know what that means."

"How... How is any of that not immediate?" The Sheriff heard the fear in the woman's voice and told her what David said about the portals being fairly contained in the forest.

Once she was calm about what she saw was the immediate threat she asked, "You didn't break my curse?"

"Gold said he didn't think so, and David and Snow think only kissing my true love will break the curse, so I... I don't want to kiss you until we know for sure what defeating the Evil Queen means. That's why I called the kid. Maybe there is something in the book."

"Well if there is, you're right, Henry would know," Regina said absently. After a moment she spoke
the loudest question she had. "You think.." the brunette swallowed thickly and steadied herself then asked, "You think we share true love, Emma?"

"I don't care."

"You don't care?"

"No! I love you, I don't care if it is true or not, but I'm not willing to take the chance of kissing you if something might happen to you."

"We've kissed," the Queen reminded with a little smile and then tucked her hair behind her ear and felt the rush of her heart pounding in her chest. "A lot."

"In a magicless realm Regina." The familiar fear Emma had all the while they were in the Xenaverse came back with a vengeance. "I'm not losing you."

The Mayor heard the worry in the Savior's voice and pushed aside her schoolgirl feelings and said in a placating tone, "Of course not dear. It will be okay."

"Yeah?" the Savior asked hopefully.

"Of course, darling. We'll pay a visit to the imp tomorrow, okay? Crisis averted?"

"I still lost my bug," the blonde pouted.

"Yes well that isn't a crisis dear, that's a blessing."

"Rah-Gee-naah!" Emma whined a little, and the Mayor chuckled.

"Hey," Emma said and looked to make sure she wasn't being listened to then said, "I miss you."

"I miss you too, darling, breakfast will be served at 9, I know how you like to sleep in."

"That... That's not sleeping in Regina," the blonde complained then realized the woman was poking fun at her when the Queen cackled on the other end of the phone. "Oh I'm on to you... Fine, I'll be there Your Majesty."

"See that you are dear," the seductive voice of the Mayor spiked the Savior's desire.

"Oh, I will, with bells on!"

"Bells are optional, darling. Good night."

Ares rematerialized in the war strategy room of his earthly castle. He paced, and his mind ran over every interaction he had with the warrior princess. He stopped and looked over the main table that was covered in maps and small wooden figurines his mortal generals meticulously cared for. He stared at the little black wooden horses and imagined they were all the golden mare of his beloved. Each of the blonde beasts held a little raven-haired rider, and they all sounded out the battle cry of his warrior princess and the shrill echo manifested within his head. Her deep, seductive voice whispered in his ear, "Ares" and he turned to see there was no one in the room with him.

"Ares, I worship thee..." The velvet feel of her tone gripped him, and he bit his lower lip and closed his eyes and let himself be wrapped up in the feel of her.

"Come to me Ares..." Within his mind, he saw his love disappear into a vortex that swallowed her
and then the smug look of contempt his sibling held, and he erupted in his anger. He upended the table and bellowed, "WHERE IS SHE!?"

"...Em-ma..." his sister's pink lips enunciated the name and cackled a condescending laugh within his mind, and he erupted again this time ripping the table to shreds.

"Emma," he said through gasping breaths, aloud to an empty room. In his madness, he transported himself to the unearthly vault he had his brother Hephaestus make for him. It was made with an enchanted iron and was hidden from the other Olympian gods. It held no door and was nestled within the rock of Mount Olympus itself, and he was the only one who knew of its location. Within the vault, there was a cloaked cabinet and within that cabinet was the strange artifact his lackey Duran had discovered for him.

He read the parchment that was addressed to this Em-ma once again. Could it be a coincidence this Emma and Regina came to this world? Could these strangers be the "cuties" Aphrodite spoke of? *These strange gods with abilities unknown, come to rip my love from my grasp?*

He paced within the dark vault and considered who they were, why they were here and what did they want from his mortal?

He made a rash decision and lifted the aging parchment with ancient tongue flamboyantly etched across it. He raised the strange feeling golden compass and held onto it then lifted his hand to cast the spell. He felt a vacuum of his godly power and felt weak for the first time in his immortality. The purple and green cyclone that sporadically appeared quickly died out, and he was left once again alone and in the dark.

His rage resurfaced, and he unsheathed his sword. He slashed and bashed the blade into the metal floor of his vault until the sparks from his enchanted blade cut deep lines into where the cyclone had failed to appear.

The teasing giggles of his sister Aphrodite echoed within him, and he bellowed into the airless vault, "YOU WILL NOT KEEP HER FROM ME! DO YOU HEAR ME APHRODITE!? YOU WILL NOT STAND IN MY WAY!"

Within his mind, her chuckle stopped, and she said, "Ask the fates bro, not... my... department."

He wiped the spittle from his black goatee with the back of a black leather gauntlet and then smoothed back his black curly mane as he mustered up effort to calm himself.

"Yes," he sneered, "the Fates."

He replaced his treasures within the cloaked cabinet then transported himself to the hall of fates located in the highest tower off of the highest spear on Mount Olympus. At the end of the long dark corridor, the three women attended their lomb shrouded in a misty haze.

"Ares," the first of the fates spoke. She was Chotho, the spinner of the thread and youngest in appearance.

The second was Lachesis, who measured mortals short thread and wove it into the tapestry. She was the matron of the fates, and she spoke, "Be."

"Careful," the third fate spoke. She was Atropos, the crone, in charge of cutting the life thread of mortal or god, when their time came.

"Ladies," the suave god drawled, "Clearly you know why I'm here."
"Yes," all three of the beings spoke in unison with their eerie monotone voice that seemed to penetrate the god that stood before them.

"How do I get to her." He felt an unnatural urgency to be reunited with his mortal, so he got right to the point.

"That is not," the childlike Chotho spoke.

"The question," Lachesis added as she absently measured.

"Dear brother," the aging Atropos said.

Ares watched as Lachesis measured out a life thread and held it for Atropos the crone to snip it off. He paced and considered his dilemma. He knew that he could not use his brawn with the sisters three, he needed to use his wits.

"Why..." he looked around the dark hall then lowered his voice and asked, "Why couldn't I open the portal?"

"You require."

"More power."

"Dear brother," the fates said in succession. Their monotone voices void of inflection.

Ares laughed, "More... Power? I am a god!" He barked the term as if he believed the lie he told himself.

Without ceasing their busy work the women, each said;

"The wool you use."

"To cover your eyes."

"Is transparent to us," each of them looked knowingly up at the god of war.

With his patience wearing thin he asked, "Fine. How do I get more power?"

"A sacrifice in the hands of a god."

"Can channel life essence from."

"One powerful being to another," the crone enunciated her verse with a snip of her shears.

"What you seek."

"Is the Hind's."

"Blood Dagger, brother."

"The Hind's Blood Dagger?!" He said with disgust. The Hind's were a mystical race of beings, feared by the Olympian gods because their blood could end an immortal's life. It was said they were all dead, snuffed out by Zeus himself. He heard whisperings amongst his siblings that the Hind's blood was used by Zeus to suck the godhood from his rival gods and this discovery by Hera, Zeus's wife, is what spurred him to eradicate the beasts. He rolled his eyes petulantly, and as he turned from the fates, he grumbled, "Well at least I know a fitting sacrifice."
Chapter 46

Emma Swan set her alarm and was up and ready and waiting until she could make her way to Regina's mansion on Mifflin Street. She came down the stairs, and her parents were already up and in the kitchen, and to her surprise, they had an early morning guest.

"Hey Rubes," Emma said with an unsaid curiosity.

"Sweetheart! You're up early!" her mother said in an extra cheery voice, and Emma's quiet curiosity lifted a knowing eyebrow.

"Okay, what's wrong?" the blonde asked.

Red and David looked at one another, and her mother looked to either of them for help, but no one was answering.

"Did the squad car fall into a portal too? Because if so, Dad I'm going to need your truck, I'm having breakfast with uh... Regina and Henry."

"What about finding your true love to break the curse sweetheart?" her mother asked carefully.

"Uh, I think she's got that under control," Ruby said cryptically, which brought scrutiny from two sets of green eyes and a pair of blue.

She smiled smugly at Emma and explained, "Wolf's hearing."

Emma's eyes narrowed, and pointed her finger at Ruby and said, "Not another word, you."

Snow opened her mouth to question her girlfriend, and her daughter pointed that finger at her and said, "And no asking! Like Rubes said, I got it handled. Gina and I are going to go talk to Gold today to figure out the curse debacle."

"Gina?" the Prince asked and then looked at Red to confirm his suspicions then back to his daughter and his smile widened.

Oblivious, Snow wrinkled up her nose in distaste and said, "Don't ever let Regina hear you call her that." She scoffed and turned to pour herself more of her caffeine free tea. "I promise you'll get a front-row view to the Evil Queen if you do."

"Mom," Emma said in a serious tone and then leveled a look towards Red and David which made them both retreat into the living area of the apartment to give the women some privacy.

"Yes, sweetheart?" Snow turned around unaware.

"Look, um... Some stuff happened, in the uh... Xenaverse."

"Oh yes, you'll need to tell me all about it! Hey, where's..."

"Mary Margaret," Emma said and tried to convey her serious tone, but her mother was either hyped up on hormones or just too happy she was home to really clue in so Emma said in a hushed tone trying to be mindful of Ruby's supersonic hearing. "Mom, can we not call Regina, evil anymore?"

"I was kidding sweetie." The brunette shrugged her shoulders then added, "Kind of."
"No, I know, but just like you don't live with seven midgets, and Ruby is actually the wolf, there's more to Regina's story than I think even you know."

"Honey are you okay?" 

Emma wiped the tears that fell in the all too recent memory of secrets revealed. "Yeah," she sniffed back her upset and flashed her mother a tight smile. She eyed her father and her friend sitting on the couch talking and drinking coffee and realized the cat was all but out of the bag. She decided she would need to just tell her mom about how she felt about Regina and deal with the repercussions, whatever they may be. She cleared her throat and said, "Also, I think Regina might be my true love, but even if she isn't, I am certain I'm in love with her."

"I'm sorry, what?"

Emma took a deep breath and caught Ruby's glance then repeated herself to her mother.

"Okay. That's what it sounded like you said."

"If you're upset, I get that, but apparently I'm not going to be able to keep this quiet for five minutes, and I want you to hear it from me."

"I'm not upset sweetie, I'm happy as long as you're happy and if she is your true love well, that'll fix the curse issue," Snow said with a shrug.

"I..."

"What?"

"I don't know, I thought you'd be..."

The brunette chuckled, "Hellbent on keeping you away from the clutches of my evil stepmother?"

"Well, yeah!" Emma exclaimed then sheepishly said, "Maybe a little bit."

Snow looked over towards the two people in the world that made her life complete then looked back to her daughter and said, "Love sometimes comes in ways you don't quite expect. I'm just happy she makes you happy, baby."

"Well, that's, uh... Very cool of you, mom," Emma said with a genuine smile.

Emma nervously stood outside the intimidating white mansion of one Regina Mills, took a deep breath then lifted the golden knocker on the center of the door and announced her presence. She heard heels click toward the door and Regina's deep voice call out, "No swordplay in the house Henry!"

The white door was opened, and a fresh-faced Mayor Mills stood expectantly. She was dressed in a pair of black dress pants and a steel gray button up that was only done up to that third straining button. Emma was startled to attention when she heard Regina clear her throat and say, "My eyes are up here dear."

"Oh, I know where your eyes are," Emma snarked with a chuckle and asked, "Is that part of the negotiating tactic for our logistics meeting Mayor Mills?"

"Perhaps..." the brunette was cut off by what sounded like an explosion and then Henry's scared voice yelling, "Mom!"
Both women forgot their front door flirty banter and rushed into the house. Emma followed Regina into the living room and gasped when she took in the scene. "What the hell happened in here?"

Xena was standing in a too tight tee shirt and a pair of Regina's yoga pants that were split up the sides to fit Xena's athletic build. Every ounce of fabric was tested to its limit on the muscular frame of the Amazonian sized woman. Gabrielle was also wearing Regina's clothes, but her smaller frame managed to keep the seams from bursting. She was doing her best to calm down the angry warrior princess. Henry stood with his hands on his head looking at the big screen TV that was laying face down and currently had a chakram sticking out of the middle of it.

"That's a damn lie!" Xena exclaimed and pointed at the dead TV.

"What the...?" Emma started to ask then Henry crashed into Regina's embrace and exclaimed, "I'm sorry!"

"Okay someone, start making sense please?" Emma said and soothed her son in Regina's arms. She watched as the clearly agitated warrior princess started to pace.

"I wanted to see how our stories were told..." Gabrielle started to explain only to be cut off by an upset Xena.

"I never had sex with that... that..." she wrinkled up her nose in the disgust she held for the man in question, and spat, "pig!"

Emma walked Regina and their son to the entrance of the living room and let her take control of their upset child while Emma turned back and dealt with an upset warrior.

"I'm sure you didn't have sex with half the dude's that show had you screw. It isn't a documentary Xena."

"A Doku..." Gabrielle started to ask then shook her head and focused on her upset love, "Honey it made me look like a little girl who couldn't protect myself!"

"You couldn't when we met!"

"Yeah, but that girl they have playing me..."

Emma absently said, "To be fair, Gabrielle gets better the further in you go, then worse, then better again after Xena gets pregnant."

"I what?" The warrior spat.

"It wasn't Ares' baby!" Emma assured when she saw the brooding sapphires that were Xena's eyes chill and added, "It was like some weird reincarnation of Callisto. Like she got redemption in the eyes of god and..."

"Which god?" Xena demanded.

"Uh Eli's one true god, they totally took creative license and added all of this Christian religion stuff from this world in the last couple of seasons. Which kind of felt forced and sort of went against pretty much everything the rest of the show was about and was like really weird, but honestly it's always been riddled with plot holes the size of titans."

"So what you're saying is people in this world think I was intimate with the god of war and made a baby with my nemesis?" Xena asked, her disbelief only equaled by her annoyance.
"You forgot the part where you two aren't lovers," Emma added helpfully.

"That is suddenly the least troubling part," the warrior princess huffed.

"Yeah and my mom doesn't live with seven midgets, it's creative license."

Gabrielle put a comforting hand on her warrior's tense arm. "We would like to go to the stables today, and maybe regain some of our comfort zone."

Regina returned without Henry and put a hand on Emma's shoulder and said, "I have maps of the town you can have. I'll mark the location."

"I'm sorry for scaring your boy," Xena said with remorse.

"He'll be okay," Regina nodded in acknowledgment.

"And for breaking your teevee," Xena said sheepishly.

"Not a worry dear. Once we get you settled into a place of your own, you can throw your chakram at anything you like."

"We may camp out tonight," Gabrielle said and looked up at Xena.

"Whatever you like dear, I've got sleeping bags you two can use. When the time comes, If you would like to build your own home we have craftsmen who are familiar with old world designs, or I can purchase you one that is modern, whatever you want," Regina supplied with a warm smile.

Xena looked to Gabrielle then said, "I'm not accustomed to taking charity."

"It's not charity, you saved my life," she looked to the Savior and added, "Our lives. Besides money is no object."

"Money is no object?" Emma asked puzzled.

"No dear, I've made sound stock investments, money in this world is not an issue," Regina said quietly.

The blonde's brows furrowed in confusion and said, "But you always deny my budget proposals citing we don't have enough money!" Emma saw the sheepish look in the Mayor's face and accused, "You... you just denied my proposals to make me crazy?!

"Yes, but in my defense, you are terribly cute when you are flustered darling," Regina darkly chuckled, and Emma fish gaped at this new piece of information.

"Oh you are totally buying me a new car!" she finally settled on with a huff.

"Yes, but not another bucket of bolts, it needs to be family friendly," the Queen drawled, and Emma heard what she said, then how she said what she said then actually what she said once again.

Family friendly.

The idea of really truly honestly making a family with this woman was something Emma hadn't dared hope for, but now that it appeared to be apart of Regina's logistics, the Savior dared to see what their future could be, and more than that, dared to hope.
Chapter 47

After breakfast, Henry announced he now walked himself to school and both of his mothers stood at the door and watched him cut across the field towards a group of friends. Emma could feel the darker woman's emotion rise with how much their teenaged son had grown during their time in the Xenaverse, and she put a comforting hand on the small of the woman's back in support.

Noting her own visible upset, Regina pulled herself together a little and made her way into her office to gather up the maps Xena and Gabrielle would need in order to get out to the stables that day. She marked a large X at the destination, and a smaller X at the manor then beckoned Xena into her office to explain the topography to the ex-warlord. Once she answered all of Xena's questions, she made a call to the stable master to inform him they would be receiving guests and any costs accrued would be charged to her account.

Once the warrior and bard vacated the residence, Regina returned to her office and mentally prepared herself for the overdue discussion with Emma about their relationship.

"Do you think they'll adjust?" Emma asked as she sat down on the little white couch in Regina's office.

"I think it will take time," Regina answered as she made her way from around her desk and sat down next to the blonde. She didn't want this to feel like a budget meeting; she wanted to feel the intimacy of the blonde during this conversation. She wanted to try at any rate.

Her proximity was close as she tucked her foot casually under herself and leaned into the Savior. She could see the woman was anxious, hell she could feel the nervous energy in the room and tried to soothe the blonde with light, comforting caresses to her soft hair. She's missed the Savior, even in the few hours between their departure from Granny's and that morning. She missed the woman and didn't know how to handle actively missing her.

As she attempted to sleep the previous evening, she'd regretted sending the woman home with her parents and felt lost and displaced each and every time her sleep was disturbed that night, and she wished the blonde had been within arms reach of her.

"Yeah, but what will they do?" Emma asked seemingly trying to keep the conversation going despite her obvious concern.

"Whatever they want I suppose, they have many skills," Regina answered and tucked the loose strand she'd been playing with behind the Savior's ear.

Emma grinned and nodded, "I thought maybe once they settle in, I'd introduce Gabby to Belle, you know the bookworm thing? I think they'd get on pretty well."

"That's a great idea, darling. I'd imagine Gabrielle will excel at whatever she puts her mind to and Belle could certainly help our guests adapt to this strange world."

When the conversation seemed to noticeably lull, Emma said, "So, logistics?"

"Yes. I've," she smiled tightly and continued, "I've never dated, not really, certainly not in this world, I'm uncertain how to proceed, of what is protocol."

"Protocol?" Emma asked and turned her hand to hold the brunette's then smiled. "I don't think this is a typical situation Regina, I mean you are essentially dating your baby momma."
"Miss Swan!" The brunette's face showed the level of distaste she felt and spat, "Don't ever refer to yourself as that again, it's crass."

Emma's smile widened and said, "I am a little crass."

"No, you're a lot crass, darling, but it is my hope to guide you to be less so."

Emma chuckled and said with amusement, "Okay so let's assume that dating the Savior is, in any way, normal, I can totally take you out on dates?"

"Somewhere other than Granny's?" Regina bartered with a smirk feeling the level of Emma's stress ease in their familiar banter.

"Anywhere you want. I'm great at the whole romance thing, flowers, chocolates, love notes, champagne, you won't know what hit you," the Savior boasted with pride.

Regina picked at a non-existent piece of lint from her dress pants and gave voice to one of her larger fears, "Okay. What about Henry?"

"He's too young for champagne Regina," Emma joked seeing the stress in the darker woman's features.

Regina rolled her eyes a little then specified, "I mean what will we tell him?"

The Savior shrugged her shoulders and plainly said, "I think we should be honest with him like I was with Snow, he'll understand..."

Regina cut her off and demanded, "What do you mean like you were with Snow?"

"Oh, uh, I told her about us?" The agitation flooded the Mayor's face, and Emma cringed at the sudden change.

"You what?"

"What's wrong?"

"Other than the fact she's pathological with spilling secrets?!" the Queen exasperated.

"You want to keep this a secret?" Green eyes held the level of hurt the Savior felt, and Regina reigned in her surprise and explained, "No darling, but I want it to be us that tells our son!"

She took a deep breath then covered the Savior's hand and detailed further, "I don't want to keep you a secret, Emma. I just... What did you tell Snow?"

Emma shrugged her shoulders a little and sheepishly replied, "That I was in love with you."

"I'm sure that went over well," the Queen said with unamused snark.

"It did actually. She said she was happy if I was happy."

"That doesn't sound like her at all," Regina worried her lip in contemplation. She'd been expecting to have to counter the Charming effort to pull Emma from her evil grasp, not be warmly accepted into the Charming family.

"I know right? But she seemed pretty pro-Swan Queen."
"Swan Queen? Why not Evil Savior?" The Mayor countered defensively.

Emma chuckled, amused at the Mayor's combative nature, "Other than you're not evil?"

"Yes, other than that."

"Because Swan Queen sounds better."

Regina humphed, and Emma laughed knowing she'd won.

"So, Snow knows," Regina summed up, pushing aside her competitive drive, but also not admitting defeat.

"And is on board," Emma added then said, "If you want to take things slow, I'm okay with that."

The blonde looked up to pools of ink swirling with emotion. She knew the Queen, better than anyone and knew her love was feeling the apprehension of change and uncertainty.

Regina pulled back and snapped, "Do you want to take things slow?"

Emma identified the Mayor's defense mechanism and placated with honesty, "I don't care about slow or fast Regina, I just want to be able to love you openly and honestly the way I always have. The way you deserve."

"And what way is that Sheriff?" Regina asked, not entirely letting go of her firm defensive stance, but was also mildly intrigued.

Emma fidgeted uncomfortably as she considered what precisely she meant then admitted, "I want to kiss you hello and goodbye, I want to hold hands and be able to hug you when I think you need me to, or when I need me to. I want to be there for you, if you need me, or if you want me. I want to show you how much I care about you in a million tiny ways that make you feel appreciated, cared for and important because you are to me."

Regina was of course touched by the blonde's words and the feelings behind those words and lifted Emma's hand to kiss it but looked up with dismay when the blonde pulled away and said, "No kissing remember?"

"This no-kissing rule is decidedly unacceptable," Regina huffed her displeasure.

Emma laced her fingers together with the Mayor's and said, "I know, but I want to be sure. I really don't think I could recover if something bad happened."

"Hey, it'll be alright, I have my own, personal Savior. I've never felt safer in my life." Regina soothed the Sheriff's blonde hair as she reassured the anxious woman.

"Really?"

"Truly dear."

"I wish I had your confidence."

"Yes well, I wish I had your sculpted-arm definition," the Mayor tossed back then ran her fingers appreciating the toned muscles of the blonde and basked in the ability to do so. Once she noticed the Savior relax a little further, she asked carefully, "How did you sleep last night."

"Not great, but better than I have in weeks. I missed you."
Pleased Emma admitted it first, the Queen informed, "Your absence was felt here as well. My
sleep was disturbed on multiple occasions, and each time I awoke, I instinctively sought you out."

Regina bit her bottom lip, uncertain how to broach the next subject she wished to discuss but also
feeling the desire to. She was trying. Trying to let the blonde in. Let the blonde love her.

She considered if she could suggest a regular schedule where sleeping in the same bed could be
achieved. Perhaps moving in with one another was over the top, but she'd gotten used to having the
Savior and the one night without her had been upsetting, strange and unacceptable. A regular
schedule of synchronized nocturnal unconsciousness isn't over the line of what is socially
acceptable for persons committed to one another, right?

"My mom and dad are moving," Emma said when the silence between them had stretched too long.

"Oh? Where?"

"David said Snow found a place on the edge of town." Regina picked up on the unease this topic
brought to the blonde and assumed she'd mentioned it for a reason, so she asked, "Oh, why all of a
sudden did this come up?"

"I guess they need more room."

"Are you going with them?" Regina asked. The idea of Emma moving even further away did not sit
well within her, but she was attempting to be a supportive partner. Emma was her friend before she
was anything else and as her friend, the woman seemed upset.

"I don't think that's the plan. They're having a baby," Emma explained. She broke eye contact with
the Mayor immediately and sunk into the bitter feelings her parents having a child brought up in
her. Mainly jealousy and anger, but also the feelings of being unwanted and replaced.

The Queen could read the Savior's face as if it were an open book. What, to the untrained eye,
looked like neutral disinterest and casual conversation the Mayor knew all too well there was a
storm under the Savior's stoned features and made a rather smart assumption about how the
woman really felt about her impending sibling, "Another, dear."

"What?"

Regina slid her fingers over the shell of Emma's ear and explained, "They are having another baby.
I disagree with a million aspects of the way your parents view life, but I know one thing for certain,
you are their first born and more importantly, they see you that way. There is nothing in this world,
less another dark curse, that will change how they view you, dear."

Emma hadn't realized how badly she needed to hear that. As soon as David blurted out the news
the previous evening, everything after the words settled within her had meant little. Of course,
Snow explained how Emma was their child, but she didn't feel like their child. She felt like a sort of
messed up estranged little sister who'd made poor life choices and was being welcomed into the
family because she was there and they had to. They didn't feel like her parents, and she certainly
didn't feel like their child. "You think so?"

Knowing this was a sore topic for Emma, Regina decided to impart a relatively impartial third
party view of the situation in hopes it would help the woman she genuinely loved gain a little bit of
closure. "I'm certain of it darling. When your mother was pregnant with you, she used to sit in a
rocking chair in your nursery and rub circles over her swelling belly and talk to you."

"Talk to me? Really? Why?"
"Yes darling, because you are her child. She discussed happenings in the kingdom, what the two of you ate that day, her dreams of your future. Your father would do a similar thing when he spoke to you. He would bend down and put a protective hand over you and talk to you about nonsensical things. At the time, I viewed it as wishy-washy drivel as I was spying on them through my looking glass, but being a mother now myself, I look back and see it now as pure unconditional love."

"I don't know what to say, Regina. Thank you for sharing that with me."

What was intended as reassurances to her love, ended up being a reminder of her personal failings. "Please don't thank me, dear. I'm the one who ripped you from their love. All of your suffering, I am the cause."

Emma, who felt the shift in the Queen took up her hand and admitted, "Maybe, and I won't say that for a long time after finding out the truth, I didn't blame you and even sometimes hate you."

"Justifiably so dear," the Queen felt the pain of her actions and reactions to past misdeeds and was brought to tears.

"Maybe, but I have forgiven you," Emma said and wiped at a runaway tear as it ran down the side of Regina's cheek. "I forgave you long before I fully understood what caused you to do the things that you did. I forgave you because you didn't apologize to me, you took action to change, and that to me speaks louder than words ever could, Regina. I admire that in you."

Put off by her attempts to soothe the Savior backfiring so poorly she questioned, "May I ask you something, Miss Swan?"

"Anything, Madam Mayor."

"You said, the night we, um," Her embarrassment was palpable and the Savior took pity and offered her a kindness, "Yes?"

"You said, that night, you've loved me for some time,"

"I have," Emma nervously admitted, uncertain where the Queen was heading.

"Why? I mean, when, did you know?"

"It started when all that stuff started happening with Greg and Tamara."

"Specifically?"

"Specifics are a little difficult. I was still coming to grips with this crazy place being my new reality and then was hit with Neal showing up, who's actually Baelfire, son of the Dark One. Then all the complications with the one we don't mention his name," she paused and took a chance to look up into the eyes of the woman she'd had such a complicated relationship with since before she was born.

She wanted the brunette to hear the words as intended, not how they sounded so she pinned the woman a heartfelt look and continued, "The one thing that grounded me, amidst all that, was you." Regina broke their shyly gaze, and Emma admitted with entertainment, "It pissed me off at first, the way you'd throw your logic at any, and all situations to make them seem insignificant, but then I started to rely on it. When I was feeling out of control, I knew all I had to do was bug you a little bit, and you'd ground me again."

"You'd purposely annoy me in order to,"
"Survive. Yes," the blond finished with a serious tone then shrugged and added, "Only a little though."

"To my recollection, it was more than a little Miss Swan."

"Maybe. Still. You helped, even though you didn't realize you were and I guess that's what made it easier for me to open up and accept your help because you didn't know."

"That's what made you love me?"

"It was the start of it, I guess. It was what made me start seeing you."

"I'm sorry?"

The blonde rested a tentative hand on the Mayor's knee, uncertain of how it would be received and was relieved when a warm hand covered it and squeezed. This small encouragement gave her the green light to continue to explain herself to the Mayor. "I started to notice things about you other people didn't or couldn't recognize, and the respect I had for you grew. But, then you tried to kill yourself," Emma sadly said.

Emma was startled when the Queen pulled away from her and exclaimed, "I, what?! I did no such thing!"

"The magical trigger, Regina. The one that Greg and Tamara used to try and wipe Storybrooke off the map?"

"I remember. I was sacrificing myself, not committing suicide," the Queen explained with a huff.

"What's the difference?" Emma asked seriously.

"I was doing it for Henry."

"Maybe so, and at the time I told myself I went down in those mines to help you for Henry, but I know I went down there because losing you was unacceptable, to me."

"So that was when you knew you were falling in love with me?"

"Oh god no!" Emma exclaimed with a laugh, "I was still angry and bitter and had a one-handed pirate up my ass, but it was the start of me seeing you, and once I could see you, really see you, there was no turning back. I never in a million billion years thought you could ever be interested in the likes of me and I can't say that I ever would have told you."

"The likes of you? Seriously?"

The Queen looked angry and upset, so Emma answered in a half-hearted question, "Well, yeah?"

"You are the s..."

"Savior, I know, but I'm still just me. I'm really nothing, Regina."

"Emma! I wasn't going to say Savior! I don't feel the way I do because you are the Savior for christ sakes! I was going to say, the sweetest kindest idiot I've ever met!"

Emma giggled and said, "Thanks."

After a few moments the Queen asked, "You know when I started to see you?"
Emma shook her head silently and allowed the Queen to continue. "Before you broke my curse. You were a woman who saw my son was unhappy and your only motivation was to help him. You didn't have to do that. You could have dropped him off and left town..."

"I did try."

"Semantics Miss Swan. You stayed. You may not have understood all of the implications, but you were honest about who you were and your intentions and let's be real, I was a formidable enemy when we first met."

"I like to use the word *bitch*, but tamayto tamahto."

"Watch yourself, dear."

"Never. You said *let's be real* right after praising me for my *honesty*. You can't have it both ways, Regina."

"I'm a Queen. I can have it any way I like." Regina took up the Savior's hand in hers and fought the urge to kiss her. She needed answers from the imp, because Emma was right, if there was a chance she could be destroyed at a mere kiss, even though she was doubtful she was the Savior's true love, no matter what the Goddess of love said, she didn't want to take the chance. Not that she was afraid of being destroyed, because there are worse things in life than death.

However, she did not wish her end to be as a result of Emma's love. She felt remorse for her actions and what her actions caused, and she refused to harm the girl any further. She believed the Savior was genuinely frightened of the possibility, and decided to allow the woman to find answers before she pushed the issue. She knew for sure if the shoe was on the other foot, in order to keep this woman in her life, she would never kiss her again.
The Queen and the Savior made their way into Mr. Gold's Pawn Shop as he was reshelving several oddities post a thorough dusting. The jingle of his front door drew the Dark One's attention, and a wicked grimace slid across his thin lips as he said, "Your Majesty, and Sheriff Swan. Word is, you two made it back relatively unscathed; however, I wasn't expecting both of you to come and thank me in person. In fact, I was hoping for something less intrusive, like a fruit basket. Any fruit would be fine, except apples of course. They give me acid reflux."

"Why on earth would we thank you?" Regina spat.

"Did the witless duo claim the fame for your daring rescue, how un-charmingly of them."

"Gold," Emma said cutting off the sharp banter between her love and the imp. "The Curse. What happens to Regina when it breaks?"

"Whatever do you mean, dearie?"

"I mean if I kiss my true love and break the curse will she die?"

"Perhaps of jealousy," the imp snarked.

"Why you little…"

"Gina," Emma grabbed the Queen's hand in an effort to calm then redirected towards the Dark One, "Cut the crap Gold. I need information. You told my dad breaking the curse would 'defeat' the Evil Queen. What does that mean exactly?"

Regina felt exposed holding the blonde's hand in front of her former mentor and she fidgeted under his scrutiny.

Rumple leveled a look at the women, one had a look of irritated indignation, and the other had sincere worry and fear. For the first time in decades, the man felt empathy for the Savior's plight and replied, "Gina, since the sleepy little town of Storybrooke has regained their real memories, can you not say you are a different woman?"

"What?"

"Did the Savior not defeat the evil Queen the day your son died?"

Emma rolled her eyes and sighed in frustration, "God can you just talk like a normal person for once?"

It was the Queen's turn to sooth the Savior, and she squeezed the blonde's hand and asked for clarification, "What are you trying to say Gold?"

"What I am clearly stating if you were inclined to listen, is that the woman who held the title of Evil Queen ceased to exist when the Savior partially broke my dark curse. Was that not the turning point for you, Your Majesty?"

"I... I did make the decision to be better for Henry that day, yes."

Emma, still feeling the weight of her worry asked, "So, that's it?"
The imp snickered, "What were you expecting dearie? Spontaneous combustion?"

"A little," the Savior answered honestly.

"Alright, come on Emma, let's go."

"Gina, wait. Gold, are you sure that's all that was supposed to happen?"

"I am relatively certain your true love's kiss will not cause the Queen physical harm, Sheriff."

"Relatively certain?" Emma asked to clarify.

"My relative certainty, Savior, is ironclad," the Dark One hissed in his impatience at being questioned by the likes of Sheriff Swan.

"Emma, look at me..."

"Regina, I'm not taking the chance to kiss you based on the Dark One's version of maybe!" she lifted her hand and air quoted the word 'maybe' for dramatic effect.

"Well someone feels secure about their budding relationship," the Dark One quipped.

"Emma!" Regina grabbed Emma's hand and simultaneously shot Rumpelstiltskin a look as she drags the Savior to relative privacy.

"What? My mom knows, and you said she couldn't keep a secret."

"Knowledge is power, dearie," Rumple haughtily reminded from across the room knowing his unwanted intrusion would further agitate the Queen.

"She's been unable to at every opportunity," the Queen agreed. "I would just like to tell Henry before we tell anyone else, please?!"

"Fine, but still no kissing. I don't trust him, and I'm not willing to lose you even if it is a remote chance." The Savior slid her fingers into the darker woman's hair and caressed her cheek with her thumb. "You are everything to me, and I can't handle the thought of losing you so soon after almost losing you."

The Queen crushed into the Savior and wrapped her arms around, holding her with purpose, feeling the woman's sorrow, "Okay sweetheart, it'll be okay."

Ares materialized in his earthbound castle riding high on how quickly his half-brother bent to his will. He held his prize up and saw the glimmer of power across the blade in his hand and chuckled to himself in his giddiness. The hall doors were kicked open, and a worn for ware general entered. He was caked head to toe in mud and blood, and he had the burn of unhindered rage in his eyes. Both of these things seemed to slip by the god of war as Ares joyfully greeted, "Duran! Just the man I wanted to see!"

"Where were you?! I summoned you!" Olseph yelled as he made his way across the large open room toward his target.

"You summoned me? Just who do you think you are exactly Duran?"

"MY NAME IS OLSEPH!"
"Your name is inconsequential, Duran, I am your god. I honestly am growing tired of having to remind you of that. Perhaps I do need to replace you at the head of my army," Ares chuckled to himself.

"What army?! Your army is DEAD! Slaughtered by Amazons! And where was our god?"

"You let a bunch of tree hugging bitches defeat you, and you come here and blame me?"

The warrior roared, "WHERE WERE YOU?!"

"If you must know Duran, I was out manipulating my baby brother. Using his little half pint of a man as leverage to get something of great value to us," Ares explained with flair.

"Such as?" the general gritted his teeth trying desperately to hold himself together after his staggering defeat.

Ares revealed the dagger and whispers, "The hind's blood dagger. With this, I can sap the godhood from my whore of a sister, Aphrodite."

"That can sap a god's power?" Olseph asked suddenly very interested in Ares' prize.

"Indeed dear boy," the god exclaimed and slapped the back of his general then said with glee, "With this, I'll have the power to retrieve my Xena." Ares gripped the dagger and then struck it into the wooden table next to them and walks nearby to pour himself a glass of well-deserved ale.

With much effort, Olseph retrieves the dagger embedded into the wood and asks innocently, "How does it work?"

Ares' eyes lit up, and he happily divulged his plan to his second in command, "You require the element of surprise, but you pierce the skin and that, from what legend says, immobilizes your victim allowing you to drain their power. That little blonde bitch won't know what hit her," he giggled maniacally then explained as he started to pace the great hall, "As I suck her dry I'll make sure she regrets ever meddling with my mortal, for every strike against me she will pay." Ares turned when he felt a light burning sensation in his lower back and what he met with is the red, watery eyes of a mortal standing their ground.

"You don't even care that tens of thousands of men died in your name today! You are unfit to be the god of war! I shall rise to the challenge and become all-powerful! All knowing! All GOD!"

A look of question melted into fear as Ares burst out laughing, "You! You think you can be the god of war?! How preposterous! How ludicrous! How moronically mortal!"

His dark face lost the jovial laughter he'd just displayed and his features darkened in a way Olseph had never seen before. In quick succession, the god ripped the weapon from his hand and grabbed his throat lifting him off of the ground. "You need to be a GOD to sap power from another god Duran. You disappoint, over and over and over again!"

Ares squeezed the grip around the man's throat causing him to gasp in pain. "Have I not been benevolent to your consistent blundering? Have I not shown you mercy in the face of your epic failings? Have I not shown the utmost restraint at your insolence?!" Olseph sputtered as the god's grip tightens. "That is what it means to be a god Duran, and you think you could do better? You think you have what it takes to hold the weight of the world on your puny mortal shoulders?" Ares spat in his disgust and adds, "You let a bunch of half-naked women best you and your imbecilic army. You are nothing Duran." The god summoned a sharpened log set into the stone behind the fear-stricken man in his grasp, then lifts his former general over his head and relished in the
screams as he slowly impaled his fleshy torso with the tip.

"Now, you hang there and really think about what you've done Duran before Hades takes you to the underworld."

"Dear brother why are you torturing the animals? I told you your pathetic army was no match for my highly trained warrior women. Nude or otherwise." The icy tone of Artemis cooled the god of war's blood in his veins. Her condescending tone dug under his flesh, and her look of superiority ground his bones.

"I would choose my next words very carefully if I were you, my sister."

"You are pathetic. Your glorious victory lay in ruins, and all you can do is blame others and toss me empty threats? Perhaps it is time Zeus redefined your responsibilities, dear brother. Perhaps some time in the pit with Hades will do you some good. Perhaps it is time a successful warrior took over the title of "god of war," don't you think?"

In the blink of an eye, the dark features of her brother were millimeters from her face and a sharp pain dug into her side. The surprise of the physical pain washed over her face, and Ares' lips curled up in a joyful snarl.

"What... have... you... done...?" The gasping question fell from paling lips and confusion mixed with fear swept over the Goddess' eyes.

"I warned you to choose your right words, dear sister. You take the place of Aphrodite which suits me just fine." He breathed in as her godhood filled him with power. His muscles bulged as electrical discharge surged from his sister to him and as his body grew strong, hers decayed.

"You will not..." she hung limp, her dying words caught in her mouth as the light exited her body. Ares withdrew the dagger from her corpse and dropped the husk of a god to the cold stone floor.

He summoned a lightning bolt in his bare hand, just as his father has done and cackled in childlike joy as he tossed it across the room. He rushed over to where Olseph hung in agony and held up the dagger for the mortal to see and boasted, "With this, I will overthrow Olympus. I will reforge the council of the gods in my image and once and for all possess the power of Zeus!" He heartedly belly laughed in his crazed addiction when his once general moaned in pain. "But first, I will get my Queen. I will make her a god, and we will rewrite history in my image!"

Ares vanished as Olseph took his last breath, reappearing in his hidden vault under Mount Olympus. His skin burned with raging power as he hadn't ever felt before and he could barely contain himself as he swept his hand around and spoke the incantation.

Just as the fates predicted, the cyclone appeared in the floor. A green hue blanketed every inch of the dark room, and thunder and lightning sparked and boomed as Ares held the small golden charm that had accompanied the strange chant. With his thoughts of his love, he leapt into the center of the whirling storm and disappeared.

In the blink of an eye, he felt unimaginable pain as his body collided with rough earth. His mind unclear and his vision blurry he tried to right himself only finding that he is weak and can not lift his weight under his own power. He rolled over onto his back and looks up through a frame of twisted branches to the eternal black of the dead of night. He felt the icy tendrils of the dark seep into his body, and he fights against unconsciousness. After what seemed like hours he managed to get himself to his feet, and he felt the woozy unease recede.
The power he felt in his own world was gone, completely. He didn't feel even his own godhood, let alone his super-powered sister's. He heard a wolf howl in the distance, and he tried and failed to unsheathe his sword from his back. It weighed him down, and he could barely lift it as he ducked under the scabbard's leather harness that was wrapped over his shoulder. He felt entirely better when the weight of it thumped to the forest floor at his feet, and for the first time in his existence, he felt fear.

He could hear the animals in the wooded area around him, and he realized he was defenseless. If any of them attacked, he wasn't sure he could stop them. He looked around and chose a direction and started to walk. He needed to get out of the woods. He needed to find his love. She was here, in this world, somewhere. As he walked in circles his ever increasing anger hit its zenith, and he stopped his forward momentum, gritting his teeth to make them stop chattering he leaned against a nearby tree barely holding himself upright.

The incessant pain that originated in his gut had grown in the several hours he'd been wandering in the wilderness and a noise he'd never heard before growled from inside of him. He felt an urge like he'd never felt before and it frightened him. He started to lightly jog in the direction he'd been walking and just after daybreak he cleared the edge of the woods.

A white structure that could only mean human habitation loomed in the center of a large open field. Feeling the urgency of his hunger, he broke out into a run towards the farmhouse. The dwelling itself was dark, but the entrances were made of glass which he easily broke with the help of a nearby rock.

Once inside, he could smell the food he desperately needed and gorged himself on everything that he found. Once he was sated his weakness grew, and he could no longer stand to his feet, and there, on the floor of the kitchen, he passed out with sheer exhaustion.
Xena and Gabrielle arrived at Storybrooke stables in the early afternoon. The large open fields of the estate were framed by thinned out wooded areas that seemed to have trails carved out for the animal's exercise. There were two main structures the duo came upon as they approached the gated area up the long gravel driveway. The women headed toward the white building that seemingly housed the animals, and Gabrielle was unable to hold in her wonder.

"Xena, will you look at this place? It's fit for royalty!"

"It's something alright," Xena replied with distraction. Gabrielle had noted the stress the taller woman carried as they traveled to their destination and arriving had done little to cause the warrior to relax.

They were greeted by a large lumbering man who had the telltale scars of battle etched across his face. His voice was deep, yet his words were timid as he greeted the women and Gabrielle took charge of the conversation allowing her warrior time to look around.

"Queen Regina has informed us of your situation, welcome to Storybrooke. My name is Clive, anything you need just come and find me or my wife and we will do what we can to accommodate you."

"Thank you," Gabrielle said with sincerity then asked, "Is there a water source nearby I can refill our waterskins?" She held up the leather bladder for the man so he would understand what she needed.

"There is a cooler full of bottled water for the farm hands who volunteer," he replied and pointed to a large white machine that lined the smaller main building. "There's no charge," he added when he noticed the blonde hesitate.

Gabrielle schooled her confusion and politely stated, "Thank you. Do you mind if we just look around?"

"Anything you'd like Miss," Clive replied, bowing his head ever so slightly before returning to his work.

To the untrained eye, Xena looked at peace, but Gabrielle could see the signs of her warrior mapping out the area, taking in every inch of the place. Her muscles were tight at the ready, waiting for when the warrior would need to strike. The smaller woman placed a soothing hand on Xena's back and pulled her attention away from the obvious tension of her concern. "I'll get us some water, and then we'll take a walk out to the exercise yard, how does that sound?"

She got a tight head nod for an answer, and she gave the warrior a reassuring pat before fetching them the water that was offered.

She stood before the large humming box with her hands on her hips carefully taking in every aspect of it. She placed her hand on the box's side and smiled as she felt the vibration through the warm metal. She slid her fingertips to the shiny metal door that had a large chrome handle and was startled when the door was cold to the touch. In her surprise, she pulled away from the sensation and laughed at herself. She wrapped her hand around the handle and tried to pull it open with no success. She looked around the immediate area feeling a pang of embarrassment, but then took a closer look at how the handle was affixed to the door and she realized it could be twisted. She
stood in awe when she felt the freezing air from within the cooler hit her skin, and she whispered, "By the gods!"

She stepped closer, once the surprise had worn off a bit, and noticed the rows and rows of clear bottles that were shelved within the strange cold box. In her curious amazement, she hadn't seen a stranger approach until the person cleared their voice behind her. Visibly startled Gabrielle cried out in surprise which made the stranger apologize, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sneak up on you."

"It's alright. I wasn't paying attention. This box had me entranced!" Gabrielle replied with the level of astonishment she felt.

"I don't believe we've met," the man said and held out his hand in greeting, "My name is Archie Hopper, and you are?"

"Gabrielle," the bard replied and took the ginger man's hand in hers.

"It's nice to meet you, Gabrielle. May I?" he gestured to the cooler, and the bard stepped aside and allowed him access. She watched as he took one of the shiny clear bottles and twisted off the white cap before taking a long drink from the mouth.

"I thought I knew everyone," he said with a shy smile.

"Oh, we're new," she awkwardly offered as she reached into the cooler and took out two bottles of the water for her and Xena.

"We?" the man asked and looked to where the bard motioned when she said, "That's Xena."

"You don't mean Xena-Xena, do you?" The flushed cheeks of the man grew darker as he looked over at the warrior princess.

"Our story is different than what is told in this world," Gabrielle looked worriedly over the man, and Archie took the hint and replied, "Oh, of course! This world got my story a little off too. Still, it's a pleasure to meet you, Gabrielle!"

An eastern European accented woman's voice came from within the main building and made Archie jump, "Cricket! I'm not paying you to flirt with girlies! You come! Now!"

Archie pressed his thin lips together in an embarrassed grimace and then said, "If you two need help adjusting, my office is downtown, and my door is always open."

Gabrielle nervously chuckled and waved to the man as he hurriedly made his way back to his client. She mimicked what she saw Archie do and opened one of the bottles and took a long drink then made her way to the last known location of her love.

When she rounded the large white stable, she saw the warrior princess standing in the middle of a large gated pen alongside a black mare. The beast was as tall as Argo, and even with the warrior's significant height herself, the horse was easily a head taller than the brunette. Xena approached the visibly skittish mare slowly with her hands raised in a submissive posture, and when she was within range, she held out one of her hands offering the animal the apple slice she held. The animal hesitated, but after a moment took the offered fruit from Xena. Gabrielle got closer to the fence and watched in awe as Xena made friends.

A man nearby exclaimed in his surprise, "I thought for sure she was crazy for going in there with Midnight like that, but just look at her!"
"That's my girl," Gabrielle said with pride.

After a long day of tending to the various chores that the stable supplied to them, the warrior women set up camp on the far skirt of the property in an area the stable master, Clive, deemed safe from the Maine wilderness. The sun had set by the time Xena was rooting around for a blade sharpening stone. Gabrielle noticed that Xena bounded from one activity to another during the day, keeping both her mind and body busy. She sat back on a bedroll and watched as Xena picked up and analyzed each stone before tossing it over her shoulder in disgust.

After several moments she could see her warrior was getting more and more agitated and got to a point where she got up to assist. She picked up a dark rock that had just been discarded by the dark warrior and inspected it. "What's wrong with this one?"

"It isn't gritty."

Gabrielle picked up another rock Xena tossed and asked, "and this one?"

"Too gritty."

"Baby.."

"What Gabrielle? It needs to be just gritty enough, and all of these rocks are either too crumbly, too jagged, too soft, too flat or do not have the correct amount of grit! What kind of place doesn't make good rocks?"

"Okay, come here," Gabrielle coaxed and guided the warrior princess to a kneeling position right next to where she laid out their beds. "I want you to stay there, be still so I can get some writing done. Can you do that for me?"

The dark-haired woman rolled her eyes a little then reluctantly agreed. Gabby hadn't anything specific that required her attention, other than her warrior, but this form of forced nothingness often brought her warrior peace. Peace was what Xena needed, and Gabrielle took her time writing out long-script of how amazing Xena was that day with the animals and long after she ran out of topics to document she noticed the raven-haired woman finally let go and dropped her head to her chest.

Gabby took her time and gathered up her writing supplies to be put away and then beckoned Xena to lay her head down on her lap. When the warrior complied, she went to work petting the long hair of her love and cooing reassuring things to her. "I know this place is strange, but these people all came from a place none too different than us. They adapted, baby, we can too."

"You think so?"

"I really do."

"I'm not sure."

"I know, but trust me, I've got you." Gabrielle made a show of holding the woman to her and kissed her on the head.

Blue eyes looked up into loving green, "I trust you, I just have a bad feeling."

"That's just change my love, it's scary and isn't easy and will take time."

"I don't like it."
"I know, but we are safe. We'll stay in familiar surroundings for a little bit, how does that sound?"

"I like the horses," Xena admitted signaling her desire to stay in the area for a day or two longer.

"You impressed the owners," Gabrielle informed uncertain if the darker woman had even noticed the crowd that formed while she was making friends.

Xena shrugged her shoulders unconcerned and said, "I've always gotten along better with animals than I have with people. They speak my language."

The bard stroked her hair and soothed her as she listened to Xena talk about her experiences that day with the animals. The woman's state was calmed and Gabrielle knew this adjustment would take time and this was just the first step to their future in this new world.

The Mayor hadn't gotten any alone time with the Savior over the last few days, the woman citing helping her parents move and her fervent research into the lore of the dark curse as reasons for her distance. With their son busy with helping his grandparents as well, Regina took the overwhelming silence of her home as a motivator to get herself back to work. When she arrived at her office, she was stunned into silence at the sight she saw.

To put it bluntly, it was a chaotic mess. Papers were piled and scattered as well as half-eaten tins of Granny's take out and cans of a wide variety of drink were left, some crushed, strewn along the tops of every piece of furniture. There was a makeshift sleeping area on the couch, and someone had wheeled the AV department's TV\VCR in, and it was looking well lived in.

"What the hell happened in here?!" she exclaimed to the empty room.

"Oh thank god Regina, you're back!" David replied from behind her.

She whirled around on the man and demanded, "Are you living in my office?!"

"Only a little. It's my man-cave," the blond replied.

"It's a place of business, Mr. Nolan."

"Hey, I'm doing two full-time jobs here, both of which are subject to catastrophe at a moment's notice! It's too much for one person! I don't sleep. I cat nap!"

"Welcome to life as a Monarch, David."

"Yeah well, you can keep it. I'm glad you're back," he admitted with a little smile. His opinion of the Mayor had changed in the few days since the Savior was back. He noticed things in the way his daughter spoke about the Mayor and their predicament. She said things that he himself had once said about the love of his life, and her dedication to the older woman was something he could identify with. He saw the lost look in his daughter's green eyes as she poured over books taken from Rumple's library; looking for anything that could settle her fear of losing Regina by breaking the curse. He's known that fear, that loss. They hadn't discussed much of what happened in the realm the Mayor and his daughter was in, but whatever it was, the man surmised was big.

Regina set down her briefcase and moved the pile of papers that sat in her seat from the chair to the desk and asked, "What is this?"

"That's to-do. I keep it on the chair, so I don't forget about it."
"What?"

"This pile over here is meeting documents," he said and put his hand on the thick stack.

She asked with an anxious tone, "Which meeting?"

"All of them."

"What?" She walked over to the pile and put her hand to her forehead and said, "You doodled on budget proposals David?"

"The meetings are boring," he blushed a little then walked to the next pile and added, "And this over here is constituent input."

"Do you mean formal citizen requests and proposals?"

"And complaints. Man, there are a lot of those."

"David, even Snow was able to keep a viable filing system!"

"She's a school teacher, Regina. I'm a farmer, and I've got sheriffing duties." He placed his hand on another pile and Regina squinted her eyes and asked, "Please tell me that's not a pile of incident reports."

"It is," he answered with an apologetic smile.

"Well, why isn't Snow handling the office while you are playing cops and robbers?"

"She thought you two were dead." He looked down and added, "I've never seen her so…"

"Broken?"

"Yeah. It was..."

"...Yes, I'm familiar with despair's work. I'm sorry David."

"Thank you for getting her home."

"She's the one who saved me."

"She hasn't talked about it."

"Give her time," she said with a sigh, "Alright, I'll call Emma, you are officially being evicted from my office, go clean up your man-cave."
Chapter 50

The heels of the Savior's boots echoed off the marble as she made her way up the main corridor of city hall; at the end of which, Regina Mills' crystalline office door boldly sat. She was startled when the door burst open, and a large black cart that had an even larger CRT TV strapped perilously to the top was pushed through. She jogged the last few feet to hold the door for her father as she saw him push the cart into the hall. She greeted him quickly, having seen him that morning, then made her way into the office of the Mayor.

"Hey," Emma said shyly drawing the Queen's attention from her laptop.

"Your father is a bureaucratic nightmare," the Mayor stated plainly.

"Yeah? The station is good," Emma replied as she looked around the disaster that was the Mayor's office.

A cool smile crossed the darker woman's face, and with an all-knowing eyebrow lift she made her way out from around her desk and picked up a towering pile of papers handing them to the Sheriff.

"What's this?"

"Incident reports," the Mayor said with quotation marks then added, "mostly."

Emma looked down and realized that only most of the papers were actually written on the report stationary and when they ran out of the preprinted pads they started using printer paper. With her mouth agape Emma asked, "How many of these are in the database?"

"I haven't gotten that far yet."

"How many are incomplete?!"

"I couldn't even venture a guess."

Emma set down the large stack on the clearest part of the long conference table and asked, "Well can't you," she wiggled her fingers and scrunched her nose and asked, "magic it all better?"

"All better?"

"You know what I mean."

"Yes but I also enjoy putting you on the spot and forcing you to explain yourself."

"Fine," Emma rolled her eyes, "can't you magickally sort and file all of this crap?"

"Unfortunately I am currently without magic, so no, I can not."

"Still?"

"You understand what the word currently means, don't you dear?"

"Well, yes… How about my magic? Can you use my magic to clean this up?" The Savior reached out her hand and took the Mayor's.

"I need to be able to feel my magic even a little bit if I'm to use yours, darling. I'm afraid we are
stuck going the long way."

"Alright. Can I give you some of it?"

"No, it will come back, I've depleted my reserves, and most of yours I'm certain."

"It will come back, and everything will be fine," Emma reassured then tucked a loose strand back behind Regina's ear and asked, "How's your head?"

"Currently? Irritated," Regina huffed and looked around her mess of an office.

"I can tell. I mean how's the headaches? Did you make an appointment to see Whale?" The worry the Savior felt for the Queen rose to the surface and she stepped closer instinctively.

"I did. The day after tomorrow."

"Would you like me to come with you?"

Regina broke the Savior's intense gaze and brushed off, "It isn't necessary."

Emma took another step closer to her Queen and took her hand and clarified, "Let me rephrase that, may I come with you. I'd like to hear what they say and be able to ask questions."

"Oh really…?"

"I want to make sure that big ole brain of yours is okay."

Regina smiled knowingly and asked, "Why's that, Sheriff?"

"Your wit is your best asset." Emma licked her lips and let her eyes drop down over the Queen's other assets.

"Really," Regina smirked stepping closer and asked, "Are you busy this evening?" She'd been feeling the Savior's absence and wanted some easy alone time with the woman.

"Yeah, we both are."

Confused Regina asked, "Whatever do you mean?"

"Mom and Red are having a welcome home party for us tonight, remember?"

The Queen shook her head and replied, "No I am completely unaware. Let me guess, Granny's?"

"Is there anywhere else?" Emma chuckled.

"Yes! There's the park, the rec center, the high school gymnasium! The conference auditorium here at city hall! I don't know why they insist on having every celebration at that cramped little diner!"

The blonde shrugged, "I don't know, my mom likes it there?"

"Yes well…" she looked the Savior up and down and asked, "Are you busy after the sardine get together?"

Emma smiled shyly and stated, "I'm all yours. What did you have in mind?"

Regina blushes as she admits, "I've missed your presence."
"Me too. I'm sorry I've been helping with the move. The parents are all in now, so my free time…"

"Belongs to me," the Queen stated firmly.

Emma licked her lower lip as she tentatively rested her fingers on the hips of the Mayor. Regina's warm body was easily felt through her cotton blend dress pants, and the Savior's heart quickened. She was frozen about how she felt about the Mayor, stuck between desire and fear. Fear the visit to the Dark One had not quelled. She hadn't necessarily been avoiding the brunette, her parents move had taken much of her time, but she'd also been looking for any mention of the dark curse and the consequences of breaking it. For all parties involved.

Being this close to the Mayor's warmth, the desire portion of her feelings took over, and she blurted, "What are you going to wear tonight?"

"Why?" Regina coyly asked and wiggled closer to the Sheriff wrapping her arms up around her neck.

"Something to get me through this afternoon. Wear red..."

"What? Why?"

Emma got closer and breathed in a husky tone, "You may think your color is black, but trust me, it's red."

Regina barked out a surprised laugh and teased, "Oh really, Miss Swan…"

Both women were startled from their flirtation by David clearing his voice as he picked up his bedroll and pillow off of the couch.

"Don't mind me!" he said with a red face and a knowing smile.

"He's never felt more like a Dad than just now," Emma groaned.

"I'm sure he would love to hear that dear." The Mayor cupped her warm hands under Emma's chin and said in a serious tone, "I'll wear red for you if you come home with me tonight."

"Are you alright?"

"I'm uncertain," the Mayor admitted and kept a watchful eye out for the blonde's father before adding begrudgingly, "I don't wish to be alone."

Regina has always had difficulty voicing her needs. Her wants she screamed from the rooftops, but her needs were never anyone's priority. Not even with herself. In the time she'd been back in Storybrooke she'd felt her solitude acutely, it reminded her of the mind numbing years before Henry when all she had was her empty revenge and year upon year of reflecting on her mistakes. Being alone was unsettling to the brunette, and she was feeling a genuine need to be in the blonde's presence.

"Alright," the gentle tone of the Sheriff reassured her, and she nodded her agreement.

Ares stood in the dining area of his borrowed accommodations leaning over a large parchment. The candlelight is dim, and he is vigorously etching in the boundary of Storybrooke's downtown area. The map grew as he's explored and studiously taken down detailed notes of his exploration.

In the top left-hand corner of the makeshift map was a large circled area just behind the square that
represented the farmhouse. Angry dark lines filled in the circle and similar smaller circles littered the entire area. These places were where the god of war encountered strange natural behavior and was a warning for him to steer clear of those places. Those areas marked his pristine body with burns, some so severe he'd needed to bandage himself.

The weakness of his arrival has started to lessen as each new day presents itself, though he still did not have his godly power and was frightened that he would never get it back. He needed the power to get back home with his prize, and whenever he tried to summon it, he grew weak once again. The weakness was receding, as well as the pestilence that weakness brought on. He needed strategy, order to the chaos he currently felt and above all else a plan to get him and his bride home.

A thump at the front door pulled Ares' attention from the careful sketching of his battle map, and he pulled out his dagger and went to investigate. The door he'd smashed to gain entry still had shards of glass littered both inside and out of the dwelling. His boots crunched as they ground down the mess and he opened the front door. He held out the blade as if its mere presence would frighten away anyone sinister and saw a white parchment laying on the top step of the porch's stoop. He lifted the document and read aloud the headline:

"The Savior Returns!"

Under the large dramatic text was a photo of this blonde Savior next to a few other people and he looked her over with distaste as he was never one for blondes. They were generally irritating in his experience.

Reading further he concluded that the power this Savior had was significant, the document tolled on about how her and her magic would once again keep the residents of this sleepy little town safe. The article advertised a town gathering to celebrate this woman's return, this Emma Swan. "Emma," he spat, knowing this was the same Emma who had stolen his bride, his warrior princess. Ares recognized the name of Granny's listed in the article and took the document back to his map and made a small X at a small square that represented the location. A cool smirk appeared on the god of war's face. Not only would he get his power from this Emma, but he would take it from her tonight!

Ares hid in the shadows and watched as more and more mortals pack themselves into the small dwelling across the street.

He waited until he recognized the statuesque form of his love walk up holding the hand of her little bard. They huddled together, and Gabrielle kissed his love, making his blood boil, but he kept his eye on the prize. He would deal with the bard in due time.

His goal was to get his godhood stable before he attempted taking his mortal. In this state, the woman's considerable skills would defeat him for certain. He was uncertain as to his mortality in this strange world, and if his burns were any indication, he would need to be careful with his life. He brooded long after his love entered the dwelling until he saw his prize walk up with a group of mortals. He would be patient. He wanted her alone; just for a few moments.

He stalked around the dark alley next to the crowded building and found a side entrance. As he slipped into the darkened hallway, he thought about how easy this would be. His power popped as he forced the dagger to glow with magic. The light of the blade dimmed and sputtered as he fought to hold on. He just needed it active for a second, the power he drew from the Savior would replenish him.
He stuck to the shadows as he eyed the young blonde woman, smiling and talking to a crowd of devoted believers.

A yearning he'd fought to control slammed into him and his knees buckled in need. The euphoria that accompanied worship was painfully missed, and as he managed to regain control, the front door opened, and a far more interesting being entered the main room.

He walked in with a confident saunter and a beautiful young brunette on his arm.

The power he exuded was enough to make the god of war hesitate. Reevaluate his plan. He hadn't factored in other more powerful gods. As he reconsidered, a group of plainly dressed beings picked up his attention, they too had god-like abilities, but not as strong as the old man. Perhaps these were impure gods such as his half-brother. Whatever the case, it wasn't the fight he'd planned on and with extreme reluctance he ducked out of the diner in order to regroup.

Emma Swan did her best to talk with as many of the townsfolk as she could. Every one of them wanted to hear about the fearless Savior battling evil in order to make it home to her family. After a couple of hours, she was all but done with the situation and poured a bit of Granny's secret stash of Baileys into her mug of hot cocoa.

She sipped the warm beverage and watched the townsfolk let loose. She looked on as her father leaned in and kissed her mother then made himself between friends and neighbors, disappearing into the crowd. She looked down and smirked at how positively domestic her parents are when she noticed long fingers grasp her mother's, and a pair of green eyes met. The shy smile the taller auburn haired woman gave her pixie haired counterpart hit Emma squarely in the chest. The world slowed as a protective arm wrapped around the smiling Princess.

"What's going on?" Emma asked with accusation.

Both pair of green eyes looked up and met the shocked eyes of the Savior, Emma repeated herself louder when no one answered her.

"Are you cheating on dad?"

"No!" Snow exclaimed in surprise.

"How could you?"

"I'm not..." The pixie haired woman looked up at the wolf for help.

Emma followed her mother's gaze and exclaimed, "and Rubes, David's like right there man!"

"He knows," Ruby said and held up her hands in defense.

The Savior exclaimed in horror, "I'm not sure if that made it better or worse!"

Red looked down at her love with bemusement and Snow turned to her daughter and explained, "We were waiting for the right time to tell you, sweetheart your father and I and Red are,"

"I will give you a hundred bucks not to finish that sentence. And EW!"

"What ew?" Henry asked saddling up next to Ruby.

"Exactly, what ew?" Rubes asked with offense.
Snow exclaimed, "You're in love with my stepmother, Emma! We are far from conventional."

"You're in love with my mom?! What the hell Emma?"

The Savior held up her hands and said in a panic, "Woah, kid! Mom?!

"Does my mom know?" Henry demanded.

The boy's upset drew his adoptive mother's attention, and she came up and stood next to Emma and asked, "Does mom know what, darling?"

"Oh shit!" Emma closed her eyes knowing this was about to turn into a disaster.

"Language," Regina scolded.

Snow looked sheepish and apologized, "I didn't know it was a secret."

Regina took in the surprised look in her son's face and the beet red his mother carried and repeated, "Do I know what?"

Emma looked sorrowful towards her son knowing his mother was going to lose her collective mind. "Yes she does, we were going to talk to you about it tomorrow."

Regina turned to Emma and demanded, "You told him?"

"No grandma did," Henry offered helpfully.

"Miss Swan!"

And there it is.

"I know, I'm sorry!" Just as Regina was about to lay into the blonde for circumventing her carefully devised plan that had only been rescheduled because of circumstances, Mother Superior interrupted them.

"I sense a putrid stench of dark magic, and for once, it isn't Regina."

"Bug off Moth, this is a family discussion," The Mayor said none too pleased with the interruption.

Annoyed with the dig Emma said, "Rumple is dark magic, it's probably him."

"No, it was coming from a man in the back." The mousey woman informed.

"Which man?"

Blue looked around then shrugged and said, "I don't see him. He was by the lavatory."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know, sister?" Emma asked with contempt.

"Emma, as much as I hate to defend the gnat, even I don't know everyone, and I brought them here."

"The nuns are in everyone's business Regina," Emma defended then turned back to the fairy,
"What did he look like?"

"Tall and muscular. Pleasing attributes. A little pale and sweaty."

"How tall? What color hair? Eyes? Age? How was he dressed?"

"Uh, black I suppose, young, six maybe seven thousand cycles?"

Emma shook her head, and Regina decoded, "Thirty-five. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"Miss Swan…"

Emma leaned into the brunette and said quietly, "It's nothing, really, just a strange feeling. We'll talk later."

The tension was cut when a loud scuffle drew everyone's attention to the other side of the room. Ruby got up to help David break up the argument, and Emma looked around at the townsfolk with a worried scowl. She absently snaked her arm around the Queen and asked, "Mom take Henry home with you will ya? It's getting a little too festive in here."
They stood out in front of Granny's diner and watched their son as he went off with his grandparents.

"Alright so what's wrong?"

Emma started pacing and said, "We've had a couple of..." she was cut off when a menacing warrior princess barged out of the diner holding a drunken Prince Thomas away from a screaming blonde Princess.

"Why'd you let him touch you Cindy? Slumming with the riff-raff? My father was right about you!"

The blonde screamed back at him, "Jealous he'd rather touch me than you Nancy?!"

Xena tossed them out into the street and smiled at the two women watching in stunned silence and said with a wide smile, "This town is rowdy!"

Regina looked worriedly towards the arguing couple as they made their way up the street and said, "They aren't normally this rousing."

"Yeah, it's getting late too. According to mom and dad, they're just blowing off steam."

The women followed Xena back inside and saw that Granny was up on top of the counter yelling, "The party's over. You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!"

Emma loops her hand into Regina's and tugged her to the back where it was a little more quiet and said, "You look great by the way."

"I'm in a power suit Emma, I look ridiculous, but it was the only thing I have that is both red and uncinged. Without my magic I was unable to repair anything else to satisfaction."

"The effort is appreciated. You look..."

"Like a snooty fucking bitch!" The drunken slurs of a dwarf drew both women's attention.

"Aren't you supposed to be Happy?"

"Fuck you!" the dwarf said and stumbled away.

"I have a bad feeling. They're acting strange," the blonde said with worry.

"I agree, perhaps we need to bite the bullet and try and break the curse."

"I've been looking into that."

Regina stepped back and said cautiously, "So you don't think kissing me will break it."

"What I think is true loves kiss doesn't define my feelings for you, but I want to know everything about the consequences of breaking the curse, before attempting to break it."

Regina looked around at the few stragglers leaving the diner and said, "Well we know the consequences of not breaking it."
"This is a new thing. Dad didn't say anything about the curse tweaking out the locals."

"Which means what exactly?"

"I thought maybe it has something to do with Blue's tall dark and handsome. A couple of disturbance reports cited a lurky dude. I'm gonna revisit the files. Tomorrow."

"We can't just sit on this Emma." Regina was feeling anxious and irritated and had been for several days. Combined with her solitude it made the brunette quicker to snap and regress into a woman she hadn't been in some time.

Emma leaned into the Mayor's personal space and asked, "I'm not. I just need one more night with you. Please let me be happy one more night? David said the curse's crazy stuff was isolated and since they quarantined that side of town no more incidents have been reported. Please let me have one more day?"

Regina relaxed her grip on her irritation then wrapped her arms around Emma and shushed her, "Alright, darling. You'll come home with me?"

Strong hands gripped the Mayor's back and a blonde head nodded into a red shoulder pad.

"It's just super suspicious that there are these peeping Tom calls all of a sudden, Blue saying the guy smelled of magic and the townsfolk getting all uppity," she pointed a finger at the brunette and added, "since we've been back."

Emma Swan followed the Mayor as she let them into the dark mansion.

"Shoes," the darker woman commanded when Emma tried to move deeper into the home. Green eyes rolled as she kicked off her tennis shoes at the door.

"You make connections without facts Miss Swan, it is entirely possible that the fabric of existence as we know it is just being systematically broken down as we speak and is causing the townsfolk to get," she air quoted, "uppity," Regina said as she flicked on lights moving into the kitchen.

"Is that all?" the blonde deadpanned and followed the Mayor distracted by the questions spinning in her own head.

She leaned against the countertop in the center of the kitchen and watched as Regina got them each a drink.

She hadn't asked the blonde what she wanted, she just pulled the bottle of beer out of the fridge and popped the top before setting it next to a contemplating Emma.

"The curse was intended to make them suffer. It's reasonable to think the degrading system would do something similar to a higher degree." Regina leaned back and looked at the Savior's gears churning then added, "So let's assume the curse and the rabble are unconnected from the possible magical peeping Tom; who is he?"

"He could be new." Emma's hollow voice struck the Queen before she informed, "David said they dropped a spell for the portal and a kind of compass leading to Storybrooke into one of the vortexes."

"Well that was monumentally stupid! Your mother is wildly impulsive and..."
Regina's accusatory tone snapped Emma from the edge of uncertainty and she defended what felt like an attack, "Hey Rumple was all systems go too!"

"You say that like he's *my* responsibility!" Regina looked flabbergasted at the mere suggestion.

"Only because you say 'your mother' like what she does is my fault!"

"He is not my parent."

Emma snickered, "Are you sure? Didn't Cora…"

"Who told you that?!" She sneered, "Nevermind. Snow White couldn't shut up if her life depended on it. My skin isn't salamander Emma. The imp relishes in chaos, he always has something going on and I've rarely been able to impose my will upon him. I'm certain the times I succeeded was because that's what he wanted."

Emma considered that and backed down. "Alright well, she may not be an all-powerful gaslighting manipulator…"

"Debatable," the Queen quipped.

"But... I don't control her either. I'm sorry she told Henry about us," Emma added sadly.

"I knew she would," the Queen added folding her arms over herself defensively.

"I know," Emma admitted, conceding to the Queen. She took the beer from the counter and took a long swig.

After the silence started to stretch, the Queen asked, "So?"

"So magic Tom can literally be anyone," Emma summed up, leaning into her elbow against the counter.

"Well, no, not *anyone*. They need magic." Regina admired Emma's lean body and added, "A lot of magic."

"And a reason to deplete that magic," Emma added with worry, taking another gulp of her beverage.

"If it was depleted," a dark eyebrow raised knowingly.

"Gold said he could barely feel my magic, if you blew through all of yours and all of mine, whoever it is, is knocked out of the game. That's why he's being a creepy creeper. New world, no juice, lay of the land. We should probably talk to Xena and Gabby about the prospects of who Creepy Tom could be."

The brunette felt a familiar spark of tension between them during the banter and took a step closer to the blonde and informed, "*Tomorrow*. Tonight, we're alone." She slid her fingers up the woman's bicep and was in awe at being able to do so.

Emma chuckled nervously and reminded, "No kissing remember?"

Her fingers trailed the back of Emma's arm until they slipped into her hand and tugged her towards the staircase. "Miss Swan, I can think of so many other things I can do with my mouth."
Chapter 52

She wasn't new to her feelings for the Savior, but being permitted to act on those feelings, was. She felt out of her element, as if they were friends, then all of a sudden she awoke into a wish realm where the Savior loved her. Wanted her in ways she'd only ever dreamed about. Her nature is to distrust something too good to be true and accompanying that distrust was dark self-loathing thoughts.

Regina knew she was difficult to love. She'd certainly been told enough times. By her mother, her husband… even her own child had difficulty loving her. What hope did his birth mother have? She didn't feel deserving of the love Emma Swan was offering and feeling the rawness of that fact chilled the Mayor. Scenes given to her by the Goddess of love ran through her mind. The fear of losing Emma overwhelmed her, and that fear sparked her anger. Anger at being on the edge of another disaster, without her magic.

"Love is a weakness," she recalled the words that were forced from her in the Xenaverse as well as how Cora hissed them like a mantra. Something within her clamped down on her swirling emotions, and she pushed the Sheriff back onto her bed and stood over her. Her heart was racing; her instinct was to harm the woman. Hurt her with her words, hurt her in ways she knew she could. Push her away from the destruction of the Queen's failed attempts at love.

Everything she's ever cared for has been taken from her or has suffered under her love. She loved the blonde, more than anyone ever before in her life. The idea that the woman would suffer as a result of her affection caused pain within the Queen, and she thought that perhaps it would be easier for the woman to move on if she hurt the blonde in ways she would never forgive… so Emma could find happiness one day. With someone who deserved her.

Her anger blanketed her, and she began unbuttoning, unzipping and stripping out of her red power suit before the Savior's wide open stare. When Emma's eyes dropped to Regina's exposed body, the Queen climbed up on top of her and ripped open the Savior's shirt.

"Woah, hey…"

"Shut up and get naked."

Emma wrapped her cool fingers around Regina's wrists and stopped her, "Talk to me."

"I don't want to talk. I want to fuck. Right now." Regina's body trembled in her need for control and Emma let go of her wrist and cupped the woman's cheek. The gentle touches only further enraged the Queen, and hot angry tears slipped down her chin.

Emma considered as she looked the woman over. She saw the telltale signs of the woman she loved in the middle of a crisis. Perhaps the trauma of what they'd been through was finally catching up to the Queen. That it had just taken the few days they've been home to surface. Her fear was palpable, and Emma felt the need to give the woman the control she desired. She looked up and silently nodded her permission. She would allow whatever the Queen needed to center herself.

Regina leaned in and bit the top of Emma's breast, moaning when the Savior hissed. The hisses turn to groans as red tipped fingers pulled down lacy cups exposing the pink peaks hidden beneath. Regina's thumb pinched the Savior harshly against her knuckle and Emma's back arched into the sensation.
Menace colored the Queen's voice when she hissed, "You like that do you?"

A blonde head nodded then cried out when blunt nails dug into her ribcage.

"Please Regina," a breathy moan begged.

Satisfied she has the Savior where she wants her, the Queen pulled back and unbuttoned, unzipped and removed stubborn jeans. She immediately grabbed the Savior's mound roughly and sighed in satisfaction with the level of heat she discovered there.

Two fingers slid under the woman's underwear and entered her slick channel, causing her to gasp.

"Like this, Miss Swan?" She pumped into the writhing Sheriff and reveled in the way holding the blonde's desire in the literal palm of her hand felt.

Regina pulled away causing a whimper the way she's only ever imagined, and she looked up at dark hooded eyes.

Without a word, she pulled off the Savior's undergarments. Emma helps her then parts her legs giving Regina an unobstructed view of her sex. She rests her warm palm on the burning hot Savior and bites her lower lip when Emma reacts with a hip roll.

"Not yet Sheriff. Soon."

"Oh god, please Regina,"

"Begging is beneath you Savior," She slaps the Savior's sensitive lips and chuckles as the woman jumps in surprise. Crossing the room the Mayor took out a bag from the top drawer of her dresser. She pulls out the sizable purple dildo and heads back to the waiting blonde on her bed.

"Woah, where the fuck did you get that?"

"This is the bishop."

"It has a name?"

"It has a rank."

Emma swallowed hard, taking in the sight of Regina Mills standing in the buff holding a sizable fake cock in her hands. She silently gave her permission by spreading her thighs and let out a moan, and the Queen draped her hand over the Savior's mound.

"Open wide, Sheriff." Regina twisted the head against Emma's opening causing her to lose control over herself. She gasped as her body accommodated the forced intrusion.

"Fuck, Regina!"

"Greedy little Savior aren't you?" She darkly chuckled as she inched into the blonde until Emma took her in her entirety. She pulled back on the dyke and filled her back up. "I can't tell you how many times I've called your name with the bishop deep inside of me."

"Holy shit!" Emma felt heat flush her body at the Queen's admission. The mere idea of the Queen fantasizing about her while she got herself off was too much for the Savior, and she groaned in her pleasure.

The brunette settled into a pace that kept the Savior guessing then casually rolled her clit under her
fingers. "Tell me when you are going to come, do you understand?"

Emma vigorously nodded her head and tried to match the Mayor's rhythm. With the way Regina manipulated her, it didn't take long, "Oh god, now!"

Regina pulled the dyke out of the Sheriff replacing it with her hand and buried her face between the Savior's thighs. Emma's orgasm gripped her, and her muscles clenched around the Queen, and she screamed in her climax.

Regina's anxious anger simmered in Emma's release, and she lovingly pet the woman. She caused Emma to convulse in after-shocks as she dragged her tongue up the woman's center. Almost instantly the Mayor began feeling her anger rise again, and she bit into the blonde's thigh in frustration.

"Ow!"

"Turn over."

"What?"

"I am nowhere near finished with you, Miss Swan. Turn. Over."

Regina held her ground and after the Sheriff considered, she obeyed, turning herself around exposing herself again for the Queen. White teeth bit into a fleshy cheek, and Emma moaned into the pillow.

She slipped her hand back into the blonde and stood up behind her, thrusting with purpose. Emma whimpered into the comforter and Regina reached down with her free hand to grab a fist full of the Savior's long hair.

When she did, her fingertips grazed over a patch of distorted skin on the Savior's shoulder blade which triggered a memory.

You were harmed as a child?

I was...

Breathless, the Savior looked back at her Queen when she noticed the woman was no longer engaging. "Regina?"

Lost watery eyes searched over the Savior's form, and Emma called to the woman again when she pulled away and ran into the bathroom, slamming the door.

Regina pressed her back against the cold wood of the bathroom door and slid down to the floor. She remembered fragments. Mostly emotion, but flashes. Emma, lifting her shirt for the Evil Queen, and Regina feeling the way her evil-self felt because of the gesture. She wasn't alone. For the first time in her life, she wasn't alone. Of course Mayor Mills knew abuses happened to children, but the Evil Queen had no reference for the concept. She'd only known her shame. Her mother's secrets. Her scars.

Emma connected to the Evil Queen in a way no one had ever before and for the first time, she felt less broken. That feeling of understanding was short lived when she remembered the reason Emma had been abused at all was because of the Queen's wickedness.

She buried her head into folded arms and cried, mourning the loss of little Emma's innocence and
was filled with regret at being the catalyst of such evil. The parallels between herself and Cora had never been more apparent to her.

Everything she is, is evil — the way she protects herself, the way she gets gratification, the way she hates, even the way she loves.

Emma led the first time they made love and made love is what they did. She was tender and attentive, and Regina felt loved. When it was up to Regina she did what she always does, she took. She controlled. She hurt. She tore down and destroyed. There was no love. There was possession. Her anger.

_How can she possibly think she loves me?_

Emma scrambled and called through the door, "Regina? What's wrong?" She was stunned to hear the uncontrolled sobs coming from the other side of the door and slid down to sit against the cool wood. She didn't know what was wrong, but whatever it was, started long before they came into the Queen's bedroom. She wanted to take her Queen up in her arms but also knew whatever was going on needed to be processed first. She wasn't the woman's savior.

So instead, she sat against the door and rubbed the wood with the tips of her fingers as if she could soothe the brunette by osmosis and listened to her come undone.

After what felt like forever, she heard the Queen blow her nose through the door, and she chuckled.

"What's so funny?" a Mayor back under control demanded.

"The way you blow your nose is adorable, and I couldn't hold it in."

"You are an idiot."

"I'm your idiot," Emma answered with a smile.

The door unlocked and swung open and Emma lost her balance and laid out at the Queen's feet.

"Lucky me," Regina quipped then helped the Sheriff to her feet. She grabbed the woman and wrapped her arms around the Savior's neck and repeated with gratitude, "By the gods, lucky me."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Emma said into messy chocolate locks.

Regina shook her head and admitted, "I'm feeling a little off, I'm uncertain how to explain. I'm sorry."

Emma pulled back and looked her Queen in the eye and said, "Alright. Don't think I'm letting it go. I'm still crazy worried."

"I'm sorry," Regina said with genuine remorse.

"It's alright. Just when you can, _talk_ to me."

"I mean I'm sorry for being the source of all the pain in your life."

"You weren't the _sole_ source, but I know you are and you know I've forgiven you."

The Queen cupped the Savior's cheek and apologized once more, "I'm sorry for hurting you again tonight."
"You didn't," the blonde reassured.

A skeptical look passed over the Queen's features, and Emma relented with a chuckle, "Alright a little. The bites are already bruising."

"Oh god, Emma, I'm sorry!" Gentle hands covered the angry red marks against rosy flesh.

A loving caress rubbed behind the Queen's ear, "I'm not. It satisfied me to be able to endure it."

Regina pushed the blonde from her and exclaimed, "I don't want you to endure me, Emma!"

"I'm not!" Emma defended then stepped closer to the woman and added, "I mean I was able to take it and I don't know, being able to take it feels good. Do you like hurting me?"

"Gods, Emma, no!"

"Do you like biting me?" The hesitation in the Queen emboldened the Savior, and she leaned in and added, "Because I liked it."

"What? Why?"

Emma shrugged, "It's something that interests me, you know, from before."

Regina looked skeptical and didn't exactly want to bring up the Sheriff's past lovers while they stood naked in her bedroom but asked anyway, "Something you've done before, with..."

"No no, not with anyone," Emma quickly denied, "I wouldn't allow myself to be exposed like that with anyone else."

"But you did tonight?"

"I did. I trust you." Emma pushed the Queen's curly mess away from her face and smiled.

"You are an idiot."

"Did you forget? I'm your idiot." The stress of the word your gave Regina shivers. She's said the words plenty of times before, but this time it felt different. There was a possession that hadn't been there before, and that moved the Queen. She was already feeling out of her element and decided these feelings would need to be something they talked about when she was feeling more in control of herself, so she simply agreed, "That you are, Miss Swan."
Chapter 53

The next morning Regina awoke in the safety of the Savior's arms, grateful that the woman was still there. She thought back to the previous evening and felt irritation at how she handled herself, Emma and the situation and couldn't understand why she behaved in such a way. She didn't entirely understand what she felt or how the Sheriff played into those darker feelings. She'd opened herself up as a way to push the blonde away, but in true Swan fashion, Emma didn't shy away from the darkness.

She liked it.

Those feelings led to her fear, and that fear angered her. It felt unnatural, and she attempted to consider where the low simmer of agitation was coming from.

It must be the curse. Today needed to be the day they attempted to break the curse with true love's kiss. She felt apprehension at attempting it for several reasons. First, she wasn't entirely certain it would work. If it didn't, then what would Emma do? Go find her true love? As the Savior, she would have to. If she were to find that person, how could she be expected to believe Emma would stand by her word, or her for that matter? A dark part of herself believed Emma wouldn't.

Her second reason was that she could be the woman's true love and there was always a chance the Dark One could be wrong and breaking the curse could literally destroy her. She believed Emma would carry the burden of responsibility for her demise for the rest of her life. As it was the woman carried the burdens of others, and Regina did not want to add to her self-perceived responsibility. No, the prospect of Emma Swan carrying the burden of her death was completely unacceptable to her.

Third, and this reason is minuscule in comparison to the others, but what if they break the curse and Regina doesn't die. What would their future be? Would it play out in one of the many happy memories forced upon her by the Goddess of love or would it be dark and disastrous as she suspects it will?

She held little hope it would be the happy memories she had of Emma and their children, but the memories which left the Queen standing over Emma's broken body or grave. The prospect immobilized her, and no amount of coaxing could alter her perception.

She pushed aside speculative thoughts because the Savior would do precisely what was right. She would break it, no matter the outcome to Regina or herself and she would do so soon.

She slid her arm around the nude torso of her lover and snuggled into her. The blonde was disturbed by the move but didn't wake up; she simply pulled the darker woman's head under her chin and settled back down with her. Regina closed her eyes and soaked her in.

She considered for the briefest of moments what a bright fairytale future she could have with the Savior, full of blonde babies with dimpled chins and Charming family Christmases. Before she got far down that Candyland Rainbow Trail, she remembered the life they lived. Full of danger, magic, and unending disaster. The town would always need their Savior. Perhaps there was a compromise, and even without more children of their own, they can still achieve large extravagant holidays with their son and his future family.

If they survive this catastrophe first.
They would be going into the Sheriff's station that morning to do some research and Regina had already insisted she be allowed to tag along. Her unsettled feelings seemed to recede in the presence of the Savior and the uncertainty of attempting to break the curse had the Queen anxious.

After gathering what legible intel they had on the disturbances, the Savior decided that some reconnaissance at last known sightings would be the best place to start. They sat in Regina's Benz, the Mayor behind the wheel and the Savior sulking in the passenger's seat.

"This would be easier if I had my bug."

"What's wrong with the Benz?"

"Other than you won't let me drive it?"

"Yes, other than that Emma."

The savior furrowed her brow and tried to think of another reason. When she failed, she cried, "You won't let me drive it!"

Regina rolled her eyes and asks, "How exactly would it be easier if you were doing the driving, Miss Swan?"

"I don't know! Stop poking holes in my arguments, it's annoying!"

"Your mother is annoying."

"Yeah so?"

The Queen smiled, "So nothing, I was just stating a fact."

Emma chuckled and slipped her hand into the brunette's rigid palm. Their interactions during that morning had been hot and cold, and Emma had done her best to navigate the Queen's rollercoaster of moods. As a result, she slipped back into a more familiar role with her son's mother. She kept their exchanges light and for the most part let the older woman keep control over what intimacy they had between them.

She was worried about her. The Mayor's behavior had gotten increasingly more erratic, and she just hoped it wasn't caused by Regina's injury. She was pleased she would be getting a real-world medical evaluation. The fact of the matter was, they didn't know, and that lack of knowledge caused stress in the blonde.

"I saw the girls the other day," Emma started when their conversation lulled.

"Did they come into town?"

"No, but I was in the area, so I stopped out there. Gab mentioned Xena was having a hard time so I was wondering if there was a way we could curse them?"

A perfectly sculpted eyebrow lifted in question, "I'm sorry, what?"

"Not like erase who they are or anything, but like come up with a false backstory like everyone else has."

"It would make their time assimilating smoother. I can talk to Gold…"
"Hey who's that?" the blonde interrupted, and before the brunette could look up to see what the Sheriff was referring to, Emma leapt out of the car and ran after a dark hooded figure ducking into an alleyway.

"Emma wait!" Regina called and tried to jump from the car herself only to be tangled up in her safety belt.

Emma ran across the street and followed the large man into the alley. As she rounded the corner, she saw him turn at the T at the end of the backstreet and called out, "Hey!" When she made it to the next turn, she was surprised to find that the side street was a dead end and empty. She instinctively looked up to see if the man was somehow scaling the building in order to get away and while doing so shielded her eyes from the bright afternoon sun.

"Have you lost your damn mind or are you just monumentally stupid?" The anger in the older woman's voice chilled Emma, and she turned and looked with confusion.

"Or perhaps both!" The fear within Regina was completely encompassed in her rage.

Emma got defensive when she didn't see a hint of kidding within the Mayor and said, "Woah, hey, take it down a notch."

"I will do no such thing! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Me?! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"You! You are the most inconsiderate selfish woman I've ever encountered in my life! You don't think about anything or anyone, you just react!"

"What?"

Regina felt helpless in her fear and yelled, "What exactly was your plan, Miss Swan?! Or was running after a potential magical being defenseless all you had?"

Emma, put off by a tone in the Mayor's voice she hasn't heard from her Regina in some time barked back, "Me?! How many times have you put yourself in harms way without consideration, Regina?!"

"Never! I've always had backup plans and contingencies! You are irresponsible, and I'd be out of my mind to trust you with my heart!"

"You don't...?"

Regina saw the pained look in the Savior's eyes and regretted every word she just spoke. "That's not what I meant."

"Right," Emma said and stuffed her hands in her pockets and started quick-walking away from the contrite Queen.

"Emma, wait."

"Leave me alone Regina," she gruffed and walked away from the woman and the Benz, away from the hurtful words of the Mayor. Away from fears realized.

She turned the corner in the direction of the docks. When she got there, the scene just angered her further. Another reminder of instances where her poor decisions put everything she cared about in
danger. The decision to make Killian Jones a dark one had scraped the barrel of her pathetic, selfish behavior. She wanted him because he loved her and she put her family, Regina and their son at risk of certain death. The words the Mayor used echoed in her mind, and she covered her ears and squeezed her eyes tight trying to block out the truth in them.

A sharp pain was felt to the back of her head, and then there was nothing but dark.

The Queen's instinct was to run after Emma. To apologize. To explain herself. However, she is rooted in her position and watched as the blonde speed walked away from her and rounded the corner. She hadn't meant those feelings to surface; she hadn't actually meant them at all. Of course, Emma was trustworthy of her heart and even if she wasn't, it wouldn't matter because her heart belonged to the Sheriff. After hope died out for Emma's return, she made her way back home.

The empty manor was deafening, and the absence of the blonde was felt with extreme emotional peaks and dips. She noted diplomatically that her excessive behavior was out of character for her and perhaps she was feeling whatever affects the townsfolk were feeling with their own rage issues.

After several hours she picked up her cell phone and called the blonde. When it rang until it dumped to voicemail, she hung up and called again. This time it dumped to voicemail immediately, and she angrily hung up on an aloof Savior's greeting and pouted.

*Okay, she's mad. Of course she's mad. I would be mad too. She just needs time to cool off.* She quickly typed a text to the blonde.

**Regina: I'm sorry.**

**Regina: I didn't mean it.**

When it was time for bed Regina convinced herself that her behavior had been uncontrollable and Emma refusing to discuss it with her was just exasperating the situation and so she left one final text:

**Regina: You're mad. I get it, but I apologized Emma, and we need to talk about it. Let me know when you're ready to do that.**
Regina awoke the next morning after a restless night and scowled when she realized the Savior hadn't replied to her messages. Not only that but they also remained unopened. She dropped the phone on the empty side of her bed and bit her bottom lip in consideration. How long would the blonde need before she was allowed to discuss it with her? She pushed the phone away from her with irritation as she imagined the blonde throwing her away the first time things get heated! She didn't truly wish to push Emma away, no matter how her darker self-loathing side felt, she loved the Savior and regretted the harsh words she spoke to the woman.

She's said worse to Emma out of anger and fear, but not recently. Intimacy changed them, and she worried what would happen if perhaps the woman just refused to discuss it. If she was simply discarded. What would happen to their family? Could the blonde just drop out of her life? Henry is getting older, and there isn't much in the way of parenting left.

She decided to put away her fears about the damage she's caused and focus on her day. She got up and got dressed and made her way down to the pawn shop to see Rumpelstiltskin.

She is in no way pleased to be seeing the imp, however, she knew he knew more about making potions to manipulate the curse, and it would be far easier to barter than to start from scratch.

"Goodness your Majesty, you've looked better, trouble in paradise?"

"I am wholly not in the mood, Gold. I need…"

"Yes, I'm sure you do dearie. But I am not… in the mood… to deal."

She stood up to her full height and folded her arms and eyed him down. The strain in his voice, the size of his pupils, caused her to ask, "Are you feeling, angry Rumple?"

"We always feel anger, Regina. You know that." He looked up at the Queen when she asked with scrutiny, "Yes, but are you feeling it more?"

He wrinkled up his nose and blinked slowly, and the Queen accused, "You are!"

"Are you quite through?"

She looked over the man and asked, "You dumped a spell and directions to Storybrooke into a strange realm, why?"

"I think it's obvious dearie, to help the Savior get home."

"I've known you longer than most Rumple. You knew I knew that spell. What am I missing?"

"Perhaps your sanity," he offered with bemused snark.

She looked him up and down then asked, "You wanted one of their gods to come here. Why?"

He started to protest, and she cut him off and said, "Save it. I don't care what self-serving thing you have cooked up. Whatever it is Gold, you need to find another way. You have no idea what these things are."

"They are basically fairies, Regina."
"They are nothing like fairies," she scoffed.

"They simply wield the power they have in different ways. I think you've gone soft in your old age, dearie." The smug look on the Imp's face triggered the Queen's damn of emotion, and she barked back, "And I think you don't know when to quit while you're ahead. You've got the girl Rumple, you've got a chance at a real life with her, but she's not enough, is she?"

Large dark eyes pinned her as he hissed, "Do not push me, Your Majesty."

She rolled her eyes and demanded, "I need false memories for our newest Storybrooke residents. Now."

He exclaimed in shock,"I think you have lost your sanity!"

"No, but you owe me one."

His grip on his temper strained, "How on earth do you suppose that?"

"Because whatever it is that you brought to town, I'm going to have to help stop and contain so it doesn't kill every human on the eastern seaboard!"

He pursed his lips together and quipped, "It was your choice to join the heroes." He waved his hand over the counter with flare, and two vials appeared from the black smoke.

"It was." She picked up the glass vials and carefully put them into her purse. "Seriously Rumple, go to plan B, this is going to be hard enough as it is." She put her hand on his in an unusual show of concern and said, "She'll change you if you allow her." Turning from him with teary eyes she left the shop.

With her vision blurred, she came to with a jolt. She coughed as her breath puffed a dust cloud from the dirt floor and she realized her hands were bound behind her.

"What the fuck?" The Savior's mind was foggy, but she's aware she's in trouble. Doing her best to sit up she tried to focus her eyes in the dark. She felt with her fingers the thick cold bars of a cage, and she then inspected the bindings.

Plastic zip ties.

They were tight, but at the wrists which is an amateur move. She tried her best to get her body through the hole of her arms and after considerable time battling, her hands were finally in front of her. She untied her shoelaces then slipped one between the gap between her wrists and tied the other shoelace to the end. She leaned back and pedaled her feet in the air using the friction and heat generated by the quick lace-action the plastic melted and the ties popped off her wrists.

She re-tied her sneakers and started looking for a way that the cage opened. The cellar door was noisily ripped open, and a worse for wear warrior man came down into the room that held Emma's cage.

He had an animalistic sense to him, and Emma instinctively took a step away from the front of the cage. He held a small dagger she could see more clearly as he opened the door to the cage and hunched down to get in. She held up her hands defensively, and the blade lit up in a bluish white tint that lit up the entire cell and cast bold shadows across the god's face extenuating his menace.

Emma looked up into the man's dark features and said, "You're Ares god of war aren't you?"
"I am going to devour your godhood, and I'm not going to lie, it is going to really hurt." The pleasure he felt at the idea of causing her unimaginable agony struck the Savior and she backed away from him with caution.

His smile faded when the dagger pulsed the air with energy and dimmed and finally cut out. Emma couldn't hold back her surprised laugh at the god's magical dysfunction. Her laugh was cut off when thick meaty hands wrapped around the Savior's thin neck. Darkness closed in around her and the rage held dark man's face grew blurry, Before unconscious took her, she thought, "Okay, so I do make really bad decisions sometimes."

Regina rode out to where Xena and Gabrielle have been held up on the stables estate in order to give them each their potions and potentially bring them back into town. No matter how little the Savior was speaking to her, they needed to know what they could be up against with one of Xena's gods.

With hesitation, the warrior women each took their potion, and as the rainbow shimmer cascaded down their bodies, they both looked at Regina in disbelief.

The Mayor asked hopefully, "Did it work?"

"By the gods!" Gabrielle exclaimed and looked over at a curious looking warrior princess.

Regina stepped over to the raven-haired woman and asked, "Are you alright Xena?"

Gabrielle went straight to Xena's side and made physical contact with her warrior. Blue eyes met green, and the warrior said with an easy smirk, "I'm good."

"Are you sure dear?"

"We're good," Gabrielle reassured then her eyes grew wide with what dawned on her, "Do you have the internet?"

Regina chuckled and said, "Of course darling. Let's go home, and I'll hook you up with anything you could need."

"Can we stop at the market, I'd like to cook us dinner if I may," Xena asked softly.

The Mayor smirked and drawled, "How can I refuse?"

"By saying no," Xena replied with a teasing grin.

"I wouldn't dream of it, dear."

Regina led Gabrielle into her office and set her down at her desk. She opened up her laptop and signed into her personal account. "How much knowledge did you gain about technology?"

"I don't know, I know I want to start at Google. Is there really the answer to life, the universe, and everything?"

"I believe the answer is 42, but yes Google will get you everywhere. Where would you like to start?"

"Real estate." Gabrielle looked up to her lover and beamed with joy. "We need a house. Oh Xena, we could have a dungeon!"
"I'm sorry, did you say dungeon?"

"It's a sexual thing, Regina, don't worry."

"I'm aware of that dear, and am unconcerned." Regina cleared her throat and schooled her features then opened the top drawer of her desk and pulled out her platinum card and slid it to Gabrielle.

"Really?"

"Enjoy. Now, Xena, I do believe I was promised a home-cooked meal. Let's go start dinner shall we?"

Xena held out her elbow to the Queen and ushered her out of the office and said, "You are on wine duty, I've got the rest."

As promised the Mayor stayed out of the way as the warrior princess fluttered about her kitchen. She opened up a bottle of wine and got comfortable at the counter. She watched as Xena chopped up vegetables and browned meats. Her skills with a knife had Regina entranced.

Xena asked casually, "So where's our Sheriff? Will she be by before dinner?"

"I'm afraid I'm in a bit of trouble with the Savior, I don't anticipate her arrival since she hasn't even returned my calls." The Mayor downed the rest of her glass and poured herself a second.

Xena smirked but asked seriously, "What did you do this time?"

Regina blushed and mumbled, "My temper may have gotten slightly out of hand." Xena looked up knowingly at the Mayor, and Regina admitted, "Perhaps more than slightly."

"She'll get over it."

"I'm none too confident." Truth fell from the Mayor's lips, and she drowned that fact in a large gulp of her drink.

"The universe is vast. Far larger than I ever imagined it to be. Think of everything it took to shape each of you to be able to live this life you have with a person who is made for you in every way you are made for them. How impossible it seems that every choice in your life was the right choice because it got you here. Now. With her. It is simply miraculous."

Regina sighed and said, "Oh crap. Rumple made you into a hippie."

"The world is magical Regina. You are a miracle." The raven-haired woman winked.

"Yes, well, having magic certainly helps in the miraculous department."

"Here taste." The warrior held up the wooden spoon with a bit of the bolognese sauce she is making.

"Mhmm that has a unique flavor, what is that, lemon thyme?"

"Citrus Indica," the warrior replied casually.

The Mayor held a look with the warrior princess and asked, "Indica?"

"Yes, it's..."
"I know what it is Xena," the Mayor cut her off then calmly explained, "I work potional magic. Where did you get it?"

"Granny. I was having anxiety in this new world. That woman has serious healing knowledge," Xena praised then wiped her hand off on a tea towel.

"She has something alright," the Mayor grumbled and wondered how often Granny gave out healing tips to the residents of Storybrooke.

Xena took another taste herself and then banged the spoon against the side and set it across the open steaming pot and turned to look at the Mayor. "My point is, there's a lot going on in that girl, just below the surface."

"Don't tell me about Miss Swan, I know what motivates her," the Queen snapped.

"I would imagine you would." A patient smile parted the warrior's lips.

Regina shook her head at herself and admitted, "She sometimes doesn't think before she leaps. How am I supposed to-"

"Strategy is the cornerstone of every successful campaign, but there is much to be desired for the in the moment guttural response. Thinking on your feet, playing off the environment."

Regina lifted her glass and added before gulping down her drink, "Getting yourself killed because you run after a magical enemy into a dark alleyway, unarmed."

"Oh well no, that's suicidal," Xena agreed.

Dark eyes looked up and expressed honesty, "I question my own sanity."

"For what?"

"Lo-loving her. Gods, I've never said that out loud."

"You do though."

"I do," Regina wiped the tear that fell, and she added with a sniffle, "and I believe I've hit my wine limit."

Noting the stress in the Queen's face, Xena turned back to stir her sauce and said, "One of the hardest things I had to deal with when I finally let Gabby in was sharing my fears with her in ways that were constructive."

Regina scoffed, but Xena continued, "It's a learned skill."

"Yes well, she needs to answer her damned phone."

"She will. Give her time."

"Well, time is all I have," the Queen deadpanned then poured herself another glass of wine.
Chapter 55

A loud ringtone blared next to the Queen, and it startled her awake. She looked at the incoming call and saw that it was Charming then noted the time with a sigh.

"What is it?"

"Good Morning, Sunshine!" The man's cheery voice did little to quell her irritation.

"David," Regina warned, unamused.

"I know, I know. Look, the town switch has been going off the hook with new incidents, possibly curse related, but at this point, we're not sure. It would be great if we could get all hands on deck for the next few days."

Regina swept the sleep from her eyes and said, "There's certainly something in the water. I have a... meeting this afternoon and will be into the office afterward. We can reroute call over-flow to my office line."

"Will Emma be coming in today?"

Sudden irritation struck the Mayor, and she barked, "How the hell am I supposed to know?"

"I'm sorry, I thought she was staying up there at the Manor."

"No, she is not." Brown eyes rolled as the Queen pooled her patience. She felt the low nagging anger and attributed the flare-up to whatever was causing that within her.

She heard papers being shuffled around on David's side of the line before he informed, "Alright, I'll swing by her apartment this morning."

Regina calmed herself and said with a more soothing tone, "Call her David, she'll answer for you." Surely whatever petty anger the blonde held for her wouldn't be extended to her family.

"I wouldn't be so sure. That's why I called you. She hasn't answered any of my messages."

Her features pinched with slight concern when she asked, "When was the last time you talked to her?"

"The welcome home party," he dutifully answered.

The Queen ran over in her mind possibilities for the Savior not answering the call from her father and assumed it was simply Emma hiding away from her problems and licking her wounds. Perhaps she was hurt so deeply she was shutting out everyone in her life. "I'm afraid I've upset her," the Queen admitted. "I need to go out this morning anyway. I'll swing by the apartment to let her know she still has responsibilities, no matter how angry she is with me."

"Alright, but Regina?"

"Yes, David?"

"If you hurt my little girl, I'll kill you myself." The words he spoke contradicted the light tone he used and the Queen within Regina laughed and replied, "I wouldn't dream of it, dear."
When she hung up from the Prince, a loud, obnoxious electric guitar solo suddenly ripped through the house and Regina got up and ran towards the noise. She reached the living room to find the warrior Princess air-guitaring along with the song. She shouted over the solo, "What on earth are you doing?!"

The warrior yelled back, "Ruby gave me her Spotify password!"

Dark eyes rolled as Xena dropped to her knees faux riffing in time with the music. "Remind me to thank the pup. Can you please turn it down?" She thanked Xena when the guitar screeching became almost tolerable and asked, "Is Gabrielle still sleeping?"

Xena smiled wide and replied, "She's dead to the world, she was up all night on Pinterest, pinning our second wedding together."

Regina smirked and quipped, "From Amazon Queen to Pinterest Princess. Lovely."

There was a knock at the front door, and Regina sighed and made her way to answer it. "What is it?" She barked at a homely nun that stood on her front stoop.

The woman accused, "You shouldn't be allowed to get away with everything you've done!" The anger in her eyes was at a smolder, and Regina smirked with condescension. "I've hardly gotten away with anything dear."

"Yeah! Look at you in your satin pajamas and big house! You still control and inflict your will and judgment over all of us!" The tiny nun stomped her foot as her voice raised in anger at the smug Queen.

Xena heard the young woman yelling at the front door and came up behind and took a protective stance over Regina. The Queen merely allowed the young woman to spout her grievances with little a word and when the nun got nasty, Xena commanded with bite, "Alright that's enough. Go in peace or go in pieces, the choice is yours."

The nun looked up at the warrior with apprehension then backed off the Queen's porch slowly.

The Mayor closed the door then raised an eyebrow and commented, "So not quite a hippie then hmm?"

"I recognize you are using that term as an insult. I want you to know, I'm not taking it that way," Xena’s relaxed smile crossed her face and then she asked, "So the town isn't quite over it yet?"

"That appears to be the case," Regina answered and closed the door quietly. She tasted the telltale coppery tinge in her mouth as a result of biting her tongue and swallowed thickly. She was surprised to find the mild underlying anger she has been feeling was pushed aside for a moment as she felt the sting of the nun's words. The nun had been right even if whatever motivated the woman to unleash her anger on the Queen probably wasn't natural. The emotion behind the anger was valid, she was certain.

"Does that happen often?" Xena asked as she followed the Queen into the kitchen.

"Thankfully no. I fear Storybrooke's residents are suffering from the curse breakdown. My hope is that they will go back to normal once it's finally broken." Regina folded her arms around herself and explained further, "I've done things to these people that could never be forgiven."

Attentive blue eyes softened, and Regina huffed, "Nor do I expect them to. I don't do what I do now to atone for my sins. I do it because… well, I gather you know precisely why I do it."
"I do." A knowing smile parted the warrior's lips, and Regina felt a tightness in her chest. She felt a kinship with the taller woman, someone who really knew the draw of power. Someone who knew the face of evil and came back from the brink in one piece. The understanding the warrior had for her was overwhelming, and the Queen pushed it aside and asked, "Anyway, what would you like for breakfast?"

After preparing the first meal of their day, Regina made her way back upstairs to get dressed. She rechecked her text messages and that worrisome feeling from that morning struck her. The Savior hadn't checked her phone. She worried that the woman might have just shut it off in an attempt to hide out and away from her. That thought angered the Queen because aside from being a child and ignoring her, the woman had responsibilities she was clearly blowing off in favor of irritating the Mayor.

She pushed aside the anger she felt and prepared herself for her scheduled MRI that afternoon. She was none too fond of small spaces and was uncertain what to expect. She worried that the Savior would refuse to accompany her after all and she would be forced to endure alone.

*The way she has always been. The way she will always be.*

She went into her home office and gathered up more important paperwork to bring with her into the office when the doorbell rang once again.

She opened it to find a fresh-faced Snow White. "Regina! I'm glad you're home I was hoping we could have a little chat?"

"I really don't have the time for this right now Snow," she replied with irritation.

"Tough. Make time," the pixie-haired brunette replied then pushed her way into the Mayor's mansion.

"Do come in," the Queen quipped then looked at the time on her phone. "Make it quick. I'm going over to your daughter's apartment to check on her. Have you talked to her?"

"No, I've been setting up the baby's room."

"I thought she was helping you with that."

"No, she helped with the move. She doesn't seem interested in the baby." The sadness in the Princess could be plainly seen, and despite the wave of impatience, the Queen felt remorse for her role in their current situation. "She'll come around," Regina reassured then looked down at the time. "If you'd like to talk, I suggest you do it quickly. I need to go talk with Emma."

"Fine, I'll come with you."

Regina rolled her eyes then informed her guests she was leaving for the day and ushered the babbling Princess out towards her vehicle.

"Who we are is complex, isn't it?" Snow asked as Regina parked her car in front of Emma's apartment building.

"By God, is there a point to this anywhere in my near future?"

She marched up to the Savior's building and whirled around when Snow demanded, "Do you think
you hold true love with my daughter?"

"I haven't a clue! This is where you tell me that I'm not good for her right? Tell me something I don't know!" Regina shouted, "I can't stop loving her, and I am going to cherish every moment she returns my love because she is everything!"

The brunette heard a whir then felt a pain across her cheek before looking up into surprised green eyes before Snow collapsed before her, arrow buried into her chest.

"Snow!" Regina fell to her knees and clasped her hand over the wound that was pooling blood around the wooden shaft. Regina screamed for help and looked around the deserted street before seeing a blonde couple stand up from the bus stop bench. "Call an ambulance Snow White has been shot!"

When she saw the man lift his cell phone to his ear, she looked down at the pale lips of her former stepdaughter, the woman she's hated longer than she loved as she lay limp on the concrete of the sidewalk.

Frantic, she demanded, "Stay with me, Snow. I've got you. Help is coming just stay with me."

"Regina?"

"Shh don't talk."

Green eyes focused for a moment and a cool hand wrapped around the Queen's wrist, "I'm so sorry Regina."

"No..."

"I love you." Mossy eyes rolled into the back of the Princess' head, and she lost consciousness.

"NO! SNOW?"

The ambulance pulled up, and the men who jumped out immediately started attending to Snow, pushing the older woman aside. Regina stood and watched in horror as the E.M.T's did their job then agreed to follow them to the hospital. On the drive, she became more and more upset knowing she could have helped the Princess if she had magic. If only she had her magic.

She was held back from entering the trauma room when they arrived at the hospital, but stood just outside the doors, tears streaming down her face, unable to look away as the hospital staff worked on the limp Princess.

She saw a few of the doctors look at one another and then stopped administering life-saving support for the woman and Regina screamed, "What the hell are you doing?! Fucking save her!" The hospital staff started unhooking the various machines, and she saw the lead doctor pronounce time of death. She pounded on the glass and cried, "No! Snow?!"

It was hours that the Queen sat in the waiting room, emotionless as friends and family of the White Princess crowded in when they got the news, and it wasn't until Henry showed up that she was snapped from her daze.

"Mom?"

"Henry?" She looked up with watery, bloodshot eyes and focused on the anguish of her son.
Henry sat down next to her and said through his tears, "Who would do this?"

She shook her head and wrapped her arms around her son and cried, "I'm so sorry Henry. I don't know how this happened."

The sobs of her son broke her, and she held onto him as if he were a lifeline.

As soon as he could, he asked, "Where's Emma?"

"Emma?" she parroted then realized the woman wasn't there. She had been so lost in her own shock and grief she hadn't given it a thought. Her heart broke as she knew she was going to be the one to tell the Savior her mother was dead. "Baby, stay with David and Red, I'll go get her. I believe she has her phone off." With a kiss to his crown, she left the waiting room and headed back to the Savior's apartment. She hesitated a moment before lifting her hand to knock on Emma Swan's door.

The loud ringtone blared next to the sleeping Queen, and she reached for her phone with irritation. "What is it?" she grumbled in her displeasure.

"Good morning Sunshine!"

"David?" She asked, her sleepy haze still foggy in her mind.

"I know, I know. Look, the town switch has been going off the hook with new incidents, possibly curse related, but at this point, we're not sure. It would be great if we could get all hands on deck for the next few days."

The Queen sat up from her bed, startled, remembering everything that transpired the previous day and demanded, "Snow? Where's Snow?!!"

"I just left her at Granny's with Red, why?"

"She's not dead?"

"Dead? No. Look is Emma there?"

"No, she's…"

The loud stereo blasted downstairs and interrupted the stunned Queen. *Could it have been a dream? A premonition? A nightmare?*

"She hasn't been staying here David. She must be at the apartment. We had a fight."

"Alright I'll swing by on patrol, but Regina?"

"If I hurt your little girl, you'll kill me?"

"Slow and painful!" he said cheerily.

"Looking forward to it," she deadpanned and hung up.

She made her way downstairs and shouted, "Turn it down please!"

Once the warrior did as instructed, she grumbled, "Remind me to put down that annoying puppy."

The doorbell rang and Regina rolled her eyes and made her way down the hall. She opened the
door, surprised the nun from the previous morning wasn't alone.

"Oh look, you've made friends. Let me guess, you think it's unfair the Evil Queen gets to live out the rest of her days in fine satin, and you came here to tell me how butthurt that makes you feel?"

The few onlookers angrily nodded their heads.

"Well take a number!" she slammed the door on the angry nun's face and stalked back into the living room where Xena was doing incline pushups against her coffee table.

"Something is going on. This happened yesterday." She worried her lip and started to pace.

Sensing the Queen's agitation, Xena stopped her workout and asked, "What happened yesterday?"

"All of this. Do you remember the nun from yesterday morning?"

"A nun? No. Regina, are you okay?"

The Mayor shook her head and replied, "I don't think I am. I have a doctor's appointment today to get myself checked out."

"Alright, would you like company?"

"Emma said she would come with me. I... I need to talk to her. If this isn't my head, then it's curse related."

"Alright?" The warrior looked confused and Regina thanked her for her concern then made her way back upstairs to get dressed. She worried about long-term complications with her memory and what actual damage the toxin caused to her brain versus the curse actually ripping the fabric of time apart.

When she got downstairs, the door bell rang, and she suddenly remembered it was Snow. She ran down the hall, ripped open the door and wrapped her arms around her former nemesis and cried, "Snow!"

"Hi, Regina. Are you okay?"

"No!" she pulled back from her embrace and said seriously, "Your end will only come by my hand do you understand me?"

The Princess looked stunned and skeptical, "Well that depends, are you hatching a new evil plan?"

Regina hugged the woman to her and shook her head and said, "No, but the day is young."

"It is. We need to talk-" Snow White attempted to push passed the older brunette, but Regina was prepared and stopped her dead in her tracks. "Not this time Princess! I need to get to Emma!"

"That's what I wanted to-"

"Snow, go home." The Queen stated firmly in that no nonsense way the Princess was all too familiar.

"Rah-gee-nah," Snow whined, falling back into old habits.

"Snow White you will obey right this instant. Your daughter and I need to break this curse, today. Then you and I can have whatever mealy-mouthed heart to heart you desire."
Tears streamed down Snow's face, and she squeaked, "You share true love with my daughter don't you?"

Regina shook her head and replied, "I hope so. I promise we'll discuss it, but I believe there is something terribly wrong and whatever the cause, Emma and I will fix it."

Regina showed up at the front of Emma's building and met with David strolling out of the lobby. "She's not home," he informed with a cautious nod to his head.

The Mayor rolled her eyes then asked, "David, would she be foolish enough to leave town?"

*Of course, she's foolish enough, but would she do it?*

"Of course not! She's a Charming we-"

A whir cut through the air slicing the Queen's cheek and a surprised pair of crystal blue eyes rolled back as David hit the ground.

She looked up the street, and there was the blonde couple sitting at the bus stop as they'd been the day before. She looked in the direction of where the arrow had traveled and saw a figure duck between two buildings.

David's gurgles snapped her from her shock, and she yelled to the couple, "Call an ambulance! Prince Charming's been shot!" She knelt down next to the Prince and held her hand over his wound the way she did with his wife the day before and soothingly stroked his head. "David, it's okay. I'm going to fix this."

"Take… care… of… her…"

"I will dear boy." She closed her eyes and pushed aside the heartache hovering over the limp Prince caused and waited for the ambulance.

She drove to the hospital behind the ambulance and again cursed herself for not having magic to help the man. She met Snow and Ruby at the ER and Snow ran up to her with tears in her eyes, "Regina, what happened?"

"An arrow."

The wolf growled, "We can see that. From who?"

"I... don't know..." The Queen faltered. She felt disconnected to the scene and was having difficulty holding onto her thoughts.

"You didn't see them?" Regina shook her head no turning to the wolf then asked, "Have you seen Emma?"

"No, but she always has the scanner on, she's heard of this, and she's on her way." The tall brunette wrapped her arm around Snow and the Princess broke down in her sorrow.

Regina pulled out her cell phone and dialed Emma's number and stomped her foot when she was instantly dumped into voicemail, "This is Emma, no one uses voicemail anymore shoot me a text."

Brown eyes teared up when she heard herself in the background, "Emergency number Miss Swan."

"Oh right, if this is an emergency dial nine-one-one. Have a great day!" -Beep-
"Miss Swan you need to turn your damn phone on, we have a serious situation that needs the Savior! Yell at me later, but call me now!"

She clicked off her phone and threw it onto the waiting room sofa and started to pace. She heard the wails of her former nemesis, and she remembered being the woman who would have loved hearing her anguish. Her stomach flipped, and she hugged her midsection and considered where the blonde would be. For the briefest of moments, she thought if she'd been hurt enough to actually leave town. Lord knows the blonde wasn't above taking off and perhaps if it were just her, then yes she would go, but she had Henry and her parents. She wouldn't just leave them.

So that means she's sulking, somewhere.

Not at her apartment, hasn't been into work or Granny's.

Okay, maybe not sulking. Hurt?

Regina's eyes glassed up when she heard her son's wails as he found out his grandfather died. He saw her and rushed into her arms, "Mom!"

"It's going to be okay Henry. I'm going to fix this. I promise you." She held him to her chest and prayed that the day would repeat as it did the previous day, just so she could fix this.
Startled from a sleepless dark, the Queen grabbed the ringing annoyance and closed her eyes when the cheery greeting rang out of the speaker.

"Good morning sunshine!"

"David listen to me very carefully," she said with a calm she did not feel at all.

"I know I know, look-"

She sat up in bed and barked, "Shut your mouth and listen. Go home. Go get your wife from Granny's and go home. Do not leave until I call you and tell you that you're safe."

"What are you talking about Regina?"

"The life of your wife and unborn child is at risk, Mr. Nolan!" She waited a moment to let her words settle in the man's blond head before asking, "Do I have your attention?"

"Yes."

"Good. If you hear from Emma," holding out hope her doom and gloom outlook wasn't accurate, "Tell her I need her at the pawn shop, but under no circumstances are you or Snow to go to your daughter's apartment. It isn't safe."

Music blasted from downstairs, and Regina rolled her eyes and disconnected the line without another word. She bypassed the warrior princess and got Gabrielle up from her self induced Pinterest-coma.

"Get up your Highness."

"Five more minutes mom!" The blonde grumbled and snuggled in tighter to the bed.

Regina circled the bed and pulled at the woman's bedsheets and informed, "There's a world-ending catastrophe, and I need help!"

The blonde huffed and covered her head with the pillow and groaned, "What is that racket?"

"Miss Lucas has become password buddies with our warrior princess. Now get up!"

"Oh god, it's awful."

The brunette couldn't argue with the woman, so she instructed, "Go tell her to turn it off. We don't have a lot of time."

Regina rushed back to her bedroom and got herself nearly dressed when she heard Xena's distinct battle cry outside. She pulled a tee shirt on over top of herself and rushed down the stairs. When she opened the door, a pile of dead bodies greeted her on the front lawn. Gabrielle lay dead on the stoop; an arrow sticking through her neck, dull, lifeless eyes stared up at nothing.

"Oh no," the Queen whispered and looked out into the carnage. Several corpses she recognized came into her vision, and she shook her head in disbelief. She carefully stepped out onto the porch and saw a very dark warrior princess holding Sidney Glass with one hand and slicing her chakram through his neck with the other.
Well, that's just awful. What are you going to do now? Run amuck on Storybrooke reaping your revenge?"

Xena nodded her head with menace and dropped the little man's corpse. The Queen grumbled, "Fantastic." A dark glee overtook the warrior princess as she unsheathed her sword and ran off in the direction of the surviving mob. She looked back at Gabrielle's dead body and hoped beyond hope the day would repeat just one more time. She took out her phone and dialed her son and was annoyed when it went to voicemail.

"Mom, no one uses voicemail, text me." -Beep-

She rolled her eyes and left a message anyway, "I'm unnerved that I don't know where you are. Whatever it is that you are doing, stop. Go to the Charmings, don't let them leave no matter what they hear. I've got to make a stop at Gold's, and then I'll be by to get you, stay safe, baby boy."

She went back into her home and grabbed her jacket and then made her way to the pawn shop.

She entered the shop and saw her former mentor idly dusting off a tea set. "There's a problem," she said, her voice filled with the dread she felt.

"There always is," the Dark One quipped and replaced the teacup he was dusting and casually picked up another.

"Regina? Help!" A woman's frantic voice cut through the shop and Regina's eyes grew wide with surprise, "Is that Belle?"

"Rumple's gone mad! He has me locked in a cage!" The librarian cried in her desperation.

A grimace crossed the older man's face, and he called back, "It's for your own safety, my love! Things have gone amuck amuck amuck ah-muck!"

Regina peered at him in her skepticism and asked, "Are you awake?"

"Whatever do you mean?" A slight eyebrow lift and a wicked sneer caused the Mayor to roll her eyes and huff, "Augh, you're always awake."

She called back to the librarian, "Sit tight, Belle!"

"Regina!" The disbelief the blue-eyed beauty had was evident in her high pitched squeak. Regina turned her focus back at the task at hand, "I don't know how to fix this, how do I fix this?"

"You do, I told you. The Savior is the key."

"Emma's missing," the Mayor said with anxious regret.

"Mom's missing?"

She whipped around at the upset tone of her son and exclaimed, "Henry! What are you doing here? I told you to go to the Charmings!"

"I have an afternoon shift here at the shop. What did you mean Emma is missing? How long?! Why didn't you tell me!" The hurt in her son's eyes ripped at her heart, and she shook her head and tried to get the teen under control, "Henry, I-"

He dropped his book bag to the floor and demanded, "I'm not a little boy anymore!"
"No of course not darling, I just…” In the span of a second, he was ten years old once again, and she felt like the manipulative woman who made him believe he was crazy.

"When will you stop lying to me?!” he screamed and rushed out of the shop.

Regina cried as she ran after him, "Henry wait!"

When she breached the door to the pawn shop, she was stunned to find her son had a lance sticking out of his chest. His wide, surprised eyes bulged as he fell to his knees, blood pouring from his gaping mouth.

As the boy dropped from her view, she met the terrified gaze of a little ginger man standing a little ways away from Henry's still body. When he turned and started to run, she kicked off her shoes and gave chase quickly catching up to the man. She tripped him by throwing her clutch between his feet then pounced on him after he'd fallen to the ground. She grabbed up his collar in clenched fists and demanded, "You killed him. Why!?”

"I'm sorry! I thought it was you!" There was genuine fear in the man's blue eyes, but also remorse.

"What sadistic fucked up thing did I do to you that required sacrificing my little boy?” Her anguish was thick in her words as the vision of her son falling to the ground gripped her.

"You… you pushed the judge to give me both a fine and time in lockup for my unpaid parking tickets."

"What?" Regina wrapped her hands around the man's neck and screamed, "What!?”

He choked, "I'm sorry!"

"I don't care," she hissed through clenched teeth and squeezed his throat until she felt crunching and the man was clearly dead. She slowly got up off of the dead ginger and made her way back toward her son.

As she walked closer to him her face crumpled, and she stopped and turned away, unable to view her young son in such a state. She forced herself to turn back around, and her knees grew weak as his lifeless body was taken into view. She was overwhelmed by her sorrow and cried as she knelt next to her child. "Oh, my baby boy. My beautiful baby boy." She carefully pulled the spike from his chest and noted the blood was not pumping from the wound any longer. His dark eyes were wide and lifeless, and she pulled him into her chest and let loose her emotions on the sidewalk just outside of Mr. Gold's pawn shop. "Oh Henry!" Her heart broke, and she gasped between sobs and wished with every ounce of her life that today would repeat — just one more time.

"I told you what to do dearie."

I need to find Emma.

When the day reset she laid in bed and stared at the ceiling. She could still feel her son's blood on her hands, the smell of his shampoo, her eviscerated heart.

Never again.

She answered the annoying ringing and set Charming to task with taking care of Snow White. Then called Rumple to have him lock Henry in with Belle and got up and sent off Xena and Gabrielle to the stable for the day. She fought her way through the small angry crowd and got into her Benz and
drove to the Savior's last known location to look for clues.

She followed the alley when it dumped out near the docks and followed her instincts and walked up the pier. She wrapped her arms around herself and looked out into the water. The water used to comfort her, until their ship was attacked by mermaids in Neverland.

"Damn stupid pirate ship," she muttered. Damn stupid pirate.

Then the darkness came after you. We were all in Camelot because of me. He was going to die because of me! His love for me got him killed, how could I not try and save him?

Words that were unfamiliar infiltrated her mind, and she closed her eyes and cursed under her breath. "Dammit Emma, where are you?" She looked around and didn't see anything out of the ordinary, let alone something left behind if the Savior had been there. It wasn't as if she'd expected a sign that read, "Savior's gone fishing, be back in 10." However, the lack of solid leads irritated her, and she took off her shoes and walked up the beach. The sounds of the tiny rhythmic waves soothed her, and she thought about everything that had happened over the last three days. Groundhog day... from hell.

She decided that all of this had to be curse related. Even in her most damaged state, her brain would never conjure up the death of her son. It was a scene that she would never forget, and as the memories trickled in, she felt the weight of his loss ground her.

He is safe. The Dark One will protect him. All I need to do is find Emma.

As she met the end of the beach, she put her shoes back on and realized she was at the edge of the ranch property where Xena and Gabrielle were camping. Without any other ideas on how to find the Savior, she decided to trek up to their campsite.

She found them easily, and when she did, Xena was doing pull-ups on a sturdy branch of a nearby tree, and Gabrielle had her head buried in her laptop. "There's no way you've got bars out here," the Queen said catching the couple's attention.

Gabrielle held up a little black device and wrinkled her nose and said, "Mobile Hotspot."

"What for?"

A wide smile crossed the young bard's features, and she replied, "I'm blogging!"

She sat down next to Gabrielle and let her tell her all about the website she set up and all the topics she wishes to discuss in her new blog. The Queen listened and made suggestions and watched as new memories were triggered within the blonde. Once Xena was finished with her workout she sat down next to the Mayor and asked about the evident agitation the woman was exuding. "So what's going on, why did you banish us to the woods?"

"Emma is missing. I'm uncertain as to how to find her. The curse is breaking down, and the day is repeating just like it did for almost thirty years. Every day is a little different. First Snow died. Then David. The third day both Gabrielle and Henry died, and I've looked everywhere for her. She's gone."

A soothing smile parted the warrior's lips, and she replied, "Clearly you haven't looked everywhere Regina..."

"Hey what's that?" Gabrielle asked and pointed into the horizon. A bluish-white energy pulsed off in the distance and rapidly expanded blanketing the countryside and came straight for the women.
"A clue!" Regina exclaimed in astonishment then looked down at her cell phone and noted the time, and as soon as the electric energy swept over them, she awoke in her bed, her cell phone blaring in her ear.

After doing her morning safety check, she pulled out town zoning maps and looked over the area where she estimated the light had originated and noted the proximity to the mine shaft entrances and the quarantine zone. She bit her lip in worry remembering dropping suddenly into a magicless realm, but this time she wouldn't have the impulsive blonde hot on her heels. With little choice, she packed up and made her way out to the border of the quarantine zone to see what was out there.

She drove out to the line and noticed in the clearing, wet blobs of viscous material floating in the air. She parked her car and got out to inspect the area. Walking the length of the forest's edge, she came across her sister's abandoned farmhouse. She steered clear of the main building — too many bad memories.

She held regret that her sister was dead and hadn't intended on a reminder of that regret. She tried to forget the fiery redhead and was unsuccessful until she heard glass break from within the dwelling.

"Emma?" She rushed toward the sounds of crashing and burst into the house. She rounded the corner and skidded to a halt when a very large angry man rushed her with a blast of magic pushing her hard to the ground. His face was contorted, and he had thick red welts across his features. His crazed eyes were wide as he pounced on her, lifting his knife he smiled down on her before slicing the blade across her throat. The pain and terror she felt was immeasurable, and all she could think of as she choked on her own blood was that of her loved ones. How would Henry survive this without her? Would Emma come back, if she even could, or would she be lost forever because of the Queen's failings?

She jolted awake at the sound of David's ringtone and grabbed the place on her neck where the metal pierced her flesh. She could still feel the blade against her skin and the feel of the hot thick syrup as it flowed over her shoulders. She took a deep breath, cursed and shook off the feeling of her death then answered David's call.

Once everyone was safe, she drove directly out to her sister's farmhouse and did some reconnaissance.

Emma.

What if she fell into a portal and is stuck in another world, alone?

Focus.

She was surprised when the joints of her vehicle started to creek and was shocked when she felt the car's tires leave the ground. She opened the door and leapt from the driver's seat then watched helplessly as her Benz floated away.

"Shit."

She ducked down behind the stone wall that surrounded the property and rolled her eyes at her failed attempt at her first stakeout. As she considered what she was going to do next, she felt a burn against her ankle and hissed in pain. A small clear glob of unidentifiable liquid was clinging to her skin and where it made contact, was burning. She attempted to brush it away only for it to burn her hand and stick to her skin. She noticed as she frantically brushed the substance off that her skin turned grey as the dermis was burnt.
A woman's agonizing scream pulled her attention, and she looked toward the direction the wounded cry was coming from. She vaulted the wall and cautiously made her way toward a storm cellar she was all too familiar with.

The room was pitch black, and she looked around for the strange warrior she suspected was the god of war and then ducked inside. She heard a sniffle in the dark, the telltale end of weeping and she called out, "Hello?"

A weak voice answered, "Regina?"

"EMMA!" The Queen pushed both doors open, allowing the afternoon light to guide her and what the light revealed devastated the Queen. Her love was hanging limply by her wrists inside of a rot iron cage; she was filthy and battered and had clear wounds to her abdomen and chest. She rushed the cage only to be stopped by the thick, viscous material that clung to the metal. It burned her hand, and she cried out.

"Hold on. I'm getting you out of there!" She looked around the area, and there was little in the way of helpful implements. She tried to grab the metal again, and again the pain rejected the attempt to force the door open. Emma screamed out as little floating bubbles touched her and she could do nothing to brush them away. Regina's eyes blurred in her upset over hearing her love in such agony, "No baby!"

The Mayor reached between the bars, careful not to graze the transparent material and attempted to contact the Savior, "Emma…"

"Regina, run." The low warning was far too late when Regina noticed the lumbering warrior enter the cellar.

"What do we have here?" the man cooed toying with a small weapon.

Regina in her rage rushed the warrior only to be taken up in his powerful arms and effectively subdued. Thick hands gripped her around her neck, and she was forced in closer toward the cage.

The Savior cried as she pulled at her metal restraints, "Let her go!" She received a crazed chuckle at her futility.

The man's attention went back to his new captive, "My little pet has spunk don't you think? She's been nothing but trouble since I got her."

"Emma…" Regina's tears breached her lids in her helplessness. There was nothing she could do. She was powerless to stop him as he pressed her against the metal bars of the cage. She shrieked in pain as the thick material that coated the metal burned into the side of her face. Pain she'd never felt before in her life was only overshadowed by the Savior's anguished cries as she bore witness to the Queen's torture.

"You care about this one pet?" His laugh was sinister as he pulled the Queen away from the bars.

"Please don't hurt her anymore! I won't fight you. You can take my magic! Just let her go! Ares please?!"

Regina felt a familiar blade against her jaw and gasped as the blade sliced through the tender flesh of her throat. Emma's protesting screams echoed within her as everything went black.

David's annoyingly loud ringtone startled her from the depths of the black nothingness, and she
helplessly covered her face and let out the sob that welled up. She shook herself from the brink of her despair and answered her ringing cell phone.

"Good Morning sunshine!"

"David, Ares is here he has Emma. Gather whatever weapons we have, we need to get to her!"

"What?"

The Queen cried, "God damn it, David, he is torturing her! Right NOW!"

"What?"

"Go get your wife from Granny's, pool our resources. We need to attack him head-on. Before he becomes more powerful!"

"Ares, like the god of war?"

Music suddenly blasted from downstairs, and Regina started to cry in her frustration. "I need your help, David, please just listen to what I'm saying to you. The day is repeating just like it did during the curse, and we don't have a lot of time. We need our best line of offense ready in an hour. Can I count on you to do that?"

"Yes, of course, Regina," the man's voice was anxious and she could hear the fear behind the calm reassurance. She got off the phone and laid still for just a moment to settle the unexpected appearance of Emma Swan in her memory. The anguish at seeing her love in such a state set the Queen to focus on her goal, and she got up and marched downstairs to tell Xena to turn off the music.


"My former mentor is a selfish imp determined to make my life a living hell at every chance he gets."

The doorbell rang, and Regina stopped Gabrielle before she went to answer it. When she opened the door, she was surprised to find the Charmings, Red, Granny and six of the seven dwarves standing on her porch. There was a sizable crowd, and the White Princess was instructing the townspeople to vacate her property.

Regina ushered them into her home and Snow asked, "What's going on?"

The Queen paced as she explained the main points, her mind was scattered taking every possible chance to remind her of the desperate state of her love. She answered questions as they were asked and felt herself grow more and more agitated as time ticked by.

Xena, of course, asked all of the crucial questions about the offensive structure and took charge of pulling a plan of attack together. Regina paced and watched the clock as they slowly figured out how they would save the Sheriff.

"This is taking too long," she huffed as yet another question from the group spurred the warrior princess in a detailed explanation of tactical warfare.

"We can't go in half cocked," Gabrielle responded, her worry about the god of war etched across her face.
"We literally do not have all day. We need to go, now."

Snow pulled away from her husband's embrace and took the Mayor's hand and said, "We've only got one chance at this Regina. We can't screw this up, Gabrielle is right."

"You never listen to me! The day isn't a full day, and if we don't go soon we are going to miss our chance, and I'm going to have to do this all over again with you tomorrow!"

As it were, they assembled as many of the town's residents as was willing to help and made their way out to the farmhouse. Regina took her bow and watched as Xena briefed the newcomers. Once everyone was in place, they started their attack and much to the Queen's dismay she watched as the mighty god slew their group down a little bit at a time.

Xena's battle cry was cut off as the god froze her form then killed the bard in front of her. Regina drew back her bow and landed her shot, but the damage of the mortal weapon seemingly did little to slow the man down as he ran toward the remaining offensive townsfolk. She made a mad dash towards the cellar hoping that she could get to Emma but as she ran a sharp pain crippled her and she fell to the ground.

The burning ache under her shoulder blade paled in comparison to the pain of her lung collapsing. She laid paralyzed and felt the warm wet syrup of her lifeblood pool under her. She watched as her friends and family were mercilessly cut down before finally, the painful darkness took her once again.

I need magic. Magic and a plan.
Energized by the crippling defeat of battle, she got up and did her morning ritual then made her way down to Rumplestiltskin's shop.


A slick oily smile crossed the older man's lips as he asked, "The god of war?" The powerful god was far more than the man could hope for and he would be perfect for his grander plans.

Regina saw through the thinly veiled glee and grumbled, "Focus you little imp or so help me…"

"You'll what?" The man was startled from his nefarious plans in the face of his former pupil's insolence.

Exhausted and at the end of her patience the Queen leveled a look on the older man and hissed, "You know exactly how far I'll go, do not push me."

He considered the crazed look in her eyes, the bags under them, and the conviction in her voice and decided not to test her. "Kill him no, but contain him, possibly."

She rolled her eyes and asked, "Such as?"

"Squid ink of course!" He replied with flair which got a more prominent eye roll from the Queen.

Regina started to pace and worried her lip before asking, "How long will it possibly contain him?"

"I couldn't venture a guess," he dismissed as he turned and opened a hidden safe under a tattered oil painting behind the counter and retrieved the ink she required.

Regina took the dark bottle and examined it before stating, "Fine. He has his powers, and I can't get close to him. It isn't like he'll foolishly renegotiate a deal to get trapped by the dumbest of the witless brigade."

"Watch yourself," the man hissed, and Regina waved off the unsaid threat. "Do you still have Robin's guided arrow?"

"Technically it was mine, he stole it, but yes."

Regina thought and paced before asking, "They are like fairies, right?"

"More or less," he replied with a shrug and went back to his busy work oiling up an old wooden coo-coo clock.

Regina's lips curled into a smile, and she cooed with glee, "Well then, let's see how long squid ink will hold a holier than thou fairy, shall we?"

Regina went down to the chapel at the edge of town and sat in her vehicle and watched the comings and goings of the parishioners and townsfolk. She felt anxious about just sitting there knowing precisely where the Savior was and what the condition the woman was in. It was difficult to stay on task and not run to the Savior's aid, but she knew it was futile until she had a way of subduing the blonde's captor.
As the day wore on, she worried that Mother Superior wouldn't be making an appearance at the church and thought that she should perhaps go into the building and ask the nuns for an itinerary for the stuck-up fairy. She put the car into drive to make her way over to the church's parking lot when Ruby's candy apple red Mustang tore up the street with a very animated Warrior Princess hanging out of the passenger's side window. Her battle cry screeched as she thrust her drawn sword in the air and Regina shook herself from her shock. "Alright, well that just happened."

She turned to look to see if it was safe to make a U-turn when she saw her target alone and outside of the church. She returned the vehicle to park and turned it off then quietly got out of her car and drew the truest arrow from her quiver and pulled back the bow. With a satisfied grin, she let go of the arrow and watched as it flew straight for her prey. When it landed on target, Blue crumpled to the ground, and Regina ran over to her to see how well the ink worked.

Immediately she noted the arrow was sticking straight out of the woman's heart, and the fairy was dead. "Well shit," Regina cursed then thought perhaps the arrow needed a conscious guide. She left the woman and went back to her car and drove home feeling a little disappointed with the first try of her experiment. Satisfied, immensely, but was irritated she needed to wait to try again.

The second attempt at the woman Regina reigned in her emotion and focused on her shoulder. Again, the woman crumpled to the ground. The Mayor trotted across the street and saw the arrow was buried in the woman's neck and she was once again dead.

Regina huffed and stomped her foot as she walked away from the body back to her vehicle. She threw her bow in through the back window and slammed the door angrily as she settled into her car. She looked back at the lifeless body of someone who'd been a thorn in her side all of her life. She felt the familiar satisfaction murder once brought to her. Lashing out against the world so someone could feel the pain she felt every single day.

She blamed the fairy for that pain. As much as her mother. Rumple. Her husband.

As a child, her mother groomed her towards elevating their station; she was relentless and never, ever, took no for an answer. After long hours of correction, she would return to her bedroom, and little Regina would ask, often plead, for her fairy godmother to come and rescue her from her torment. She was left to her mother's will, then soon her husbands.

And still, she was ignored.

It wasn't until she found out the Blue Fairy had taken up with Snow White, being her counsel during the dark time after her father's passing that Regina took offense to the pious gnat. She looked back at the dead fairy before she drove away and grumbled, "Evil isn't born. It's made."

The remainder of the time she had that afternoon she brooded about the nun. Clearly, she still held resentment toward the woman, things she would never get over. She bit her lip and considered if her inner Evil Queen was directing the arrow to inflict mortal wounds on the woman. It wasn't the craziest thing she could imagine.

The next chance she took she aimed at the woman's calf and tried to not succumb to the anger within her and let go of the arrow. She was pleased when this time she could see the dark purple hue over the woman's body which also remained upright. She trotted across the street to the enraged fairy.

"I knew you weren't good! I knew it! I told Snow, but that little idiot wouldn't listen!" The shrill screech from the tightly wound woman was like nails down a chalkboard to the Queen, and she snapped, "Oh pipe down gnat, before you sprain a wing."
"You are not going to get away with this Regina! Not this time!" The fairy struggled against the magical binding, and Regina took out her phone and set her stopwatch. She folded her arms and attempted to ignore the woman's angry rantings.

"I knew I was right about you! You are your mother's daughter. You are irredeemable!" The nun's face was red and twisted in her outrage.

"Shut your mouth," the Queen warned as she looked at her stopwatch and started to pace allowing her own rage to warm low in her belly. She suddenly wanted to hurt the woman in old, familiar ways but resisted. She needed the gnat alive. She couldn't afford to reboot the day, Emma needed her.

"Everything in your bloodline is tainted, at least your death will rid of the Mills' evil from the realms once and for all."

Regina noted the sputter in the inky purple magic that covered the fairy and looked intently at the seconds as they ticked by.

"Your bogus repentance will never atone your mortal soul. You will suffer for all of eternity for your evil ways Regina Mills."

Regina stopped the watch at a neat seven minutes then ripped the arrow out of the fairy's fleshy muscle and buried it into her throat, succumbing to her dark desires she spat, "I have suffered, no thanks to you."

She backed away from the dead fairy and felt her entire body shake as adrenaline coursed through her veins. That was twice she'd succumbed to the darkness during this ordeal, and although she knew the day would reset and the woman would live, it didn't change the fact that she didn't have to kill her. She'd wanted to. That old rage within her made her sick to her stomach, and she attempted to collect herself and returned to her car.

Back behind the wheel, she saw that a small crowd gathered around the fallen fairy. A few of them were crying, others were attempting to provide life-saving support, and even more were callously taking photos with their phones.

*The people of Storybrooke were getting worse.*

The god of war was having difficulty controlling his powers. They were just out of reach most of the time, and the only way he had been able to use them has been instinctual and unconscious.

If he were going to get his Princess home, he would need more power.

After hours of trying to sap the god power out of the little blonde, he felt himself grow frustrated. The so-called Savior was shackled directly to the wall of the cellar within the cage, her weak meat sack broken and bloodied. He'd push the tip of the dagger into her flesh and focused harder than he's ever before to get the blade to light up and the few times it had, the power he drew from her was negligible. It hadn't been anywhere near as strong as she felt and he worried that the Hind's Blood wouldn't work the same in this world.

The small amount he did get off of her made him euphoric and caused him to return more and more often to feel that rush. He wrapped his hand in a new bandage and picked up his dagger and went down into the cellar. He burned himself as he opened the door to the mongrel's cage and noticed the strange burning globs had started to latch onto the metal of the bars. In his experience, there's no way to dislodge the substance once it's fully adhered, and he had deep wounds to prove
The Savior hung limp, exhausted, and bloody. He slid the tip of the dagger down her side, and she came back around with the sudden pain. "You're almost used up girl," he sneered as he looked over her pitiful state.

"Fuck you," the blonde spat weakly.

"You're not my type." He roughly slipped the first inch of his blade into the Savior's side and relished as she screamed. He relaxed in her agony and focused on ripping the godhood from her. Her face hardened in her effort to resist and the faint glow of the dagger sputtered out.

"You fucking whore! I'm going to destroy you!" he bellowed — the small space of the cellar rung with the decibel of his anger and frustration.

"You won't win. You can't," Emma spat blood from her mouth and looked up at him with defiance burning in her eyes.

Ares' laugh hung in the air causing the Savior to wince in pain, but she held her ground and gritted her teeth as she hissed, "She's out there. Right now. She is going to rip… you… apart." The blood from the Savior's lips splattered across the god's face, and she smiled in victory.

Ares face hardened, and he slid the tip further into the blonde and screamed in his rage over the certainty of the mortal and Emma sputtered blood down her chin and added with an amused chuckle, "You're already dead, and you don't even know it."

The god of war lost his control and repeatedly plunged the blade into Emma Swan and felt satisfied vindication when the light in her green eyes faded out.
Chapter 58

The phone jolted the Mayor awake, and she angrily answered it.
"Good mor....."

"I'm taking this one off Charming!" Before the man could get a word in edgewise, she hung up and threw her device across the room.

After spending the last several resets pouring through books in Rumple's library for anything about the gods of Xena's world, she was at a loss. She looked for anything that would stop him. Kill him.

Even the few iterations where she tried to subdue him and get to Emma, there wasn't enough time. The squid ink always wore off before she could pick ax her way into the cage and he always killed her. Every death was painful, and that pain lingered.

She laid in bed and realized this is going to be her life for eternity. Separated from the woman she loves, knowing she is being tortured every single day and being unable to stop it. Saving everyone, saving no one, none of it mattered. Everyone dies. No one dies. Every day startled from nonexistent sleep. Every day the town's folk got more and more unruly. Every day she is unable to stop it. She rolled over and tried to go back to sleep. It felt like years since she'd had any proper sleep and was uncertain the black depths from which she awoke daily could even be considered in any way rest.

She's had difficulty holding her temper, and as each iteration passed, it was becoming challenging to focus or even think properly. She needed rest. Perhaps with a few hours of actual sleep, she could come at the situation with a fresh outlook.

The incessant ringing doorbell woke her, and she doesn't get up until the ringing stopped and the pounding on her front door started. "I swear on all that is good in this world, this time, I am going to rip that nun's heart out!"

She yanked open the door to find a startled Snow White. The shorter woman looked her over with annoyance then barged into the Queen's home, "We need to talk."

With sleep still clinging to the Mayor, she faltered back as the Princess pushed her way into the Manor.

Regina sighed and explained, "We're not doing the talk this time Snow. I'm taking this one off, and since you can't make me talk to you I suggest you..."

"Pfff make you..." the princess paused her snarky remark when noticed the weary stress in her former stepmother's eyes and asked, "Regina, is everything okay?"

"No, not even close." The tired Queen turned and made her way into her kitchen forgoing the argument that she was sure the Princess was geared up and ready to have. She didn't have the energy to fight her, so she made her way to the stove and put on a kettle for some tea.

Snow, noting the lack of resistance from the Queen, dutifully followed then reminded, "We used to talk, remember?"

"I only talked to you because you were the only person your father allowed contact with me."

"What?"
The Queen scoffed at the absurdity of having this conversation with the White Princess but was too overtired to hold herself back. She turned, folded her arms defensively and explained, "He locked me in that room Snow."

This was a conversation they'd never had. It was a conversation the Queen never wanted to have with her former nemesis and the fact that she was broken down enough to allow it to happen angered her. Green eyes glassed up, and Snow shook her head in disbelief. Knowing the princess wouldn't remember this conversation she decided to fill in the pure of heart woman with reality. "He did far worse than that."

"You were a queen!"

"You think I wanted that?!" Regina shouted. The stress of the last few weeks had taken its toll, and she was raw, and her emotions ran high. "I was a prisoner and his property! From the moment I met you, my life was over!"

Snow shook her head and took a step closer in an attempt to comfort the visually agitated older woman, "I didn't know! Why didn't you say something..."

"Tell Daddy's little princess? Don't be foolish! You would never have…"

Snow stepped closer and leveled a look on the Mayor, "I would have believed you, Regina. I loved you. Perhaps not as my mother, but as my family, my sister. I would have tried to help."
Regina shook her head in disbelief over the words the Princess just spoke, and memories of the woman's lifeless body rushed back to her.

"...I'm so sorry Regina. I love you..."

In the painfully long moments waiting for the ambulance, Regina felt her heart break as the woman slipped away from her. It was more than the woman's death would harm the people closest to her. Or even the fear that Snow's death would be blamed unfairly upon her. She loved the woman, even when she hated her. She knew deep down the girl's actions were manipulated by her mother, that both of their lives had been, and for the first time she was able to actually admit that to herself.

A calm washed over her as she let go of old resentments when she admitted, "There was nothing you could have done. You were a child."

"I could have been your friend, Regina," Snow said, her green eyes glowing against her upset.

The Mayor turned from the woman and covertly wiped a tear from her cheek and said in a weary voice, "I can't do this right now Snow."

The Princess grabbed Regina's elbow and turned her back to face her and said, "We can't ever go back, but let me be your friend now, tell me what's wrong."

Regina took a deep breath and explained the set of circumstances they were all a part of, and when she was finished, she wiped the tear that escaped and huffed, "This is my karmic retaliation. I'm doomed to repeat this futile existence for the rest of eternity."

Snow for her part pushed passed the images of her daughter being held captive and swallowed thickly and asked, "So all you need to do is find a way to get past him?"

"You believe me?"

"Of course I do," ruby red lips pulled into a thin smile.
"Why?"

"I can tell when you're lying to me," the Princess smirked.

"Augh, you Charmings are all so annoying." She looked up at the time and realized it was close to when the day reset, and she closed her eyes at the images of her love being tortured.

"So, let me help hmm?"

"You can't do anything Snow. I've tried everything to stop him. I can't contain him for long, and there seems to be no way to kill him." Regina sighed in her helplessness.

"Why can't we just drop him into another realm with a portal?"

"I thought of that. Leading him into the quarantine zone is highly dangerous, and we don't know..."

"Red has a magic bean," the Princess interrupted.

This piece of information snapped the Queen to attention, and she exclaimed, "Wait what?!"

"She got her hands on a magic bean before the dark curse and just hasn't used it."

Regina shook her head incredulously and said, "I can think of a dozen scenarios where that would have come in handy, and she never said anything!?"

The Princess shrugged and said, "Well then we wouldn't have it now, would we?"

Regina rolled her eyes and conceded, "Fine. Where is it?"

Snow dug her phone out of her purse and stated firmly, "I'll just call her and have her bring it over. We can group up and go save my daughter."

Regina sighed in her frustration, "You never really listen to me, do you? The day is going to reset any minute. Tell me where it is precisely."

Armed with a quiver full of squid ink tipped arrows, a dwarven ax to pry open Emma's cage and a magic bean in her pocket, the Queen drove out to the farmhouse. She jumped out of her vehicle as it floated away and quickly made her way to hide behind the shed. Hearing her love scream in agony, she steeled herself against the instinct to run to her.

Soon the burly warrior lumbered out of the house and made his way toward the cellar. She carefully drew back the bow and let loose the magical arrow. The dagger in his hand glowed brightly, and he plucked the arrow out of the air and broke it in one swift move. He turned and charged the Queen, angry and roaring in his rage. She backed away and fell to the ground in her failure. She pulled out two of the non-magical arrows she coated with the ink as plan B, and the world slowed down as she aimed at him. The bright dagger he gripped shorted out, and she let loose her shot just as he was almost on top of her. The purple hue encapsulated him and froze him on the spot.

"You insignificant piss ant! I will kill you slowly!" He spat in his rage.

"Been there, done that," she quipped as she got up off of the ground and nonchalantly dusted herself off. She pulled out the magic bean and held it up for his view. "This is going to send you home Ares, but know this, the only reason you got as far as you did is that I'm still recovering. If"
you even think about returning to this realm, I will destroy you!"

"You? You are nothing!"

Regina unmasked the Evil Queen and hissed, "True danger doesn't always look all that threatening. Sometimes it's staring us right in the face, and we don't even realize it. I have access to power your tiny little mind could never even conceive of. You've been warned."

She tossed the bean at the god's feet and watched as he was swallowed into the vortex. The alarm goes off on her phone signaling the reset of the day, but nothing reset. She wasn't whisked away to an annoyingly loud ringtone and an overly cheerful Prince, so she picked up Grumpy's ax and rushed to the cellar. Just before reaching the door she jumped back as the Benz crashed down to the ground before her, flattening all four tires. She circled the vehicle in annoyance and ripped open the cellar doors.

The state of the Savior seemed worse than the last time she'd seen the woman, and she fervently bashed the tip of her ax against the metal lock of the cage. When it finally broke open, she did the same to the woman's shackles and caught the limp blonde as she collapsed.

"Regina, I'm sorry…" weak arms wrapped around her, gripping her as if she would disappear before her.

She struggled to lower the woman to the ground and replied, "No Emma, there are no sorries. I've got you now." She leaned in and kissed the Savior pouring all of the love she felt for the woman and was pleasantly surprised, and entirely relieved, when a powerful surge pulsed from them. True Love's Kiss.

"I love y…" the blonde falls limp in the Queen's arms, and she screamed the Savior's name. She ripped open the woman's shirt to assess her wounds and realized they couldn't wait for an ambulance, so she hastily picked up the Savior and dragged her to her car. The flats wouldn't stop her, so she dumped the Savior in the back and drove on the rims to get them to the hospital.

Coming to a sparking skidding halt against the side of the building, the Queen jumped from the car and alerted the hospital staff of Emma's condition. She stood aside and watched as the orderlies and nurses pulled the limp body of the Sheriff from the vehicle and loaded her onto a gurney.

She stopped one of the male attendants as he followed the rest of the group who was working on Emma into the building and stated firmly, "Under no circumstances are you people permitted to let her die, am I clear?" Frightened blue eyes grew wide at the underlying threat, and his blond head nodded before he rushed in after the Savior.
"You found me." The Savior's grumbly voice brought the Queen out of her daze. "I think that officially makes you a Charming." A white smile shown through chapped lips and Regina snapped, "Take that back right this instant."

Emma chuckled weakly and coughed for the effort. Regina grabbed a cup of water next to the Sheriff and helped her take a drink to soothe the fit. Cool fingertips grab hold of the Queen's hand, and the Savior said, "I'm sorry for running off. You were right I'm..."

"None of that matters now," the older woman said and took up the blonde's hand in hers.

"No, I need you to know you can trust me..."

"I do! It was me. I was being irrational and said things I didn't mean. I didn't mean them. Not one word of it." Regina pressed her lips to the back of the Savior's hand and felt the tears fall down over her cheeks. "No matter what mind-numbingly stupid thing you get yourself wrapped up in. You have my heart, now and always, do you understand me?"

A gruff voice startled the women, "You missed your appointment this afternoon, Madam Mayor."

"I was busy. I'll reschedule," Regina said without taking her eyes off of Emma.

"Hey, that's for your MRI? You need to make sure you're okay," Emma said weakly. Her worry over the Queen's health took precedence over even her own state, and that fact was evident in her large green eyes.

"I'm better than okay Miss Swan, and I'll reschedule after I sleep for a month," the Queen lazily smirked.

"Come here," the blonde said and made room for the Queen to curl up next to her in her hospital bed.

"Hey you can't-"

"Shut up Whale," both women said in unison and settled down in the comfort of one another's arms.

"Fine, well Emma you have visitors."

Regina sighed and made a motion to get up, but the Savior held onto her and kissed her head and said, "Stay." The Mayor gratefully succumbed to her exhaustion and curled back into the Savior's strong arms. She was far too tired to think about how she appeared to her son, the two idiots or any of the townsfolk.

Gabrielle was the first to enter the room to greet the couple followed by a pensive warrior princess.

"Hey guys, you got here fast," Emma said smiling up at their friends.

"We were already here. Gabby signed up for an internship to start off her medical career, and we
were just signing up for orientation." Tentative cool fingers slid down the Savior's arm and explored the fluid-giving needle taped to the back of her hand. Recognition chimed in, and the bard asked, "This is the IV, isn't it? And this? What's in this?" Curious green eyes looked over the apparatus.

"Saline solution," Emma responded and said, "It's all pretty similar to what the Amazon's had. I'm sure you'll pick everything up real quick."

"What is that beeping?" the bard asked then amended, "The heart monitor, right?"

Emma gasped and attempted to ask, "How-?"

Regina curled closer to her Sheriff and mumbled into her collar, "I cursed them with memories weeks ago."

"Days," Gabrielle corrected then looked with a worried scowl toward Xena.

"For you maybe," the Queen yawned and closed her eyes.

Before any of the women could ask, Henry Mills rushed the couple and wrapped his arms around both of his mothers and exclaimed, "Moms! What happened?!"

The Charmings followed suit and Emma cried out, "Damaged goods people!"

Snow cried, "Oh sweetheart, we're sorry! What happened to you?"

Emma recounted her part of the day and a half she remembered and reassured her parents that Regina had taken care of Ares.

"Ares? Was here?!" The warrior princess looked properly angry, and Regina finally spoke up. "I sent him back to your realm Princess, don't worry, he's gone."

"You did? Alone? How?" Xena asked with extreme skepticism.

"I used Miss Lucas' magic bean to create a portal back to your realm. He's gone."

The wolf accused, "You stole my bean?"

"To save the town, but no, Snow gave it to me," Regina explained and tightened her arms around the Savior.

Snow fish gaped and exclaimed, "I did no such thing!"

"How else would I know of it?" The Mayor snapped then pooled her patience and said, "Thank you by the way, because that was the only thing that worked. Every other time he killed me."

Emma felt the weight of the Mayor's ordeal and spoke up, "We can talk about this later, I'm kind of tired. Henry, go home with Snow and David. Mom and I will pick you up when they release us." The bulk of the crowd left the room and Emma placed a firm kiss to the Mayor's forehead and whispered, "You're going to need to explain to me what happened."

"I will Sheriff. I just need a light two-week coma to recoup. I don't think I've slept in a month."

Emma chuckled and said, "No more comas for you my Queen, remember?"

"I do not recall agreeing to that, Savior."
"Trust me you did," Emma chuckled then stroked the dark chocolate strands away from the Queen's face and asked, "So can you give me a cliff's notes version of what happened?"

Regina sniffed and explained, "Groundhog day from hell."

"Is that it?" Emma asked expectantly.

"Believe me, that's plenty. You're the one who wanted the condensed version. Be careful what you ask for," Regina huffed then laid a gentle kiss to the blonde's jaw.

"You'll never make anything easy will you my Queen?"

"Not in this life, my Sheriff," Regina replied and then drifted off to sleep in the safety of her true love's arms.

Ares, god of war, dropped to his father's feet in the great hall of Mount Olympus. Zeus picked up the little dagger that skidded to a halt by his side and asked, "Is this the Hind's Blood Dagger?"

Rage in the immortal's eyes exploded when realization struck him. "Did you kill my daughter!? You spoiled little brat!"

As Ares recovered from his fall and stood to his feet, he felt his godhood return to him and spat, "You're not fit to be the ruler of gods!"

"Not fit!? How am I not fit!?" Zeus demanded opening his arms wide and looked around at the other gods that littered the great hall, daring any of them to speak up.

"You make poor decisions! You grant life to people who are undeserving! You cause chaos with your pettiness and your lust for power!" The god of war roared.

Zeus in his rage plunged the dagger into his son and spat, "You are unworthy of being a god! By me, you will be undone."

The surprised look in the younger god was quickly replaced with pain and fear as the Hind's Blood dagger sapped not only his godhood but also his life force. Zeus dropped the dried out husk of his son to the ground and raged at the sky hyped up on his newly acquired power.

The annoying ringtone of her phone goes off next to her head and startled brown eyes pop open. "No!" the Queen cried when her worst fears crashed over her. A warm hand wrapped itself around her midsection, and a dry voice mumbled, "Tell whoever it is to go away."

In her joy, Regina turned and kissed the grumpy little Sheriff who complained, "Babe, my burns are still burnie!"

"I'm sorry Emma! I didn't mean to hurt you." She kissed the side of the blonde's head gently, just grateful the woman was there in her bed.

"Sokay, can you shut off the ringer? That has to be the most annoying ringer on the planet, where the hell did you get that anyway? Obnoxious Ringers R Us?" Emma grumbled with her eyes still closed, and her brow pinched in annoyance.

"Tell me about it." Regina chuckled then looked at the incoming call. Declining it, she returned to more pressing matters. As she ran her fingers over the sleepy Sheriff, she could feel the cool barbs
of her magic rush up under her skin. She waved her hand over the Sheriff's abdomen and healed what was left of the wounds making sure not even a scar was left as a reminder.

"Hey, what happened?"

"My magic is back!" Regina cooed with an excitedly wide smile.

"Cool. Thanks." The blonde snuggled into her and grumbled, "More sleep."

Regina held the woman for a moment before her fidgeting fingers explored down the Savior's body. "I can think of much better things to do with our time Miss Swan," her low voice whispered into the space between them. The blonde let out a sleepy grunt and snuggled closer.

The Queen's hand slid over the thin teeshirt that hid perfect breasts, and when she rolled her thumb over the peak, it stiffened in her hand. When it did, the Sheriff let loose a high pitched whine that forced a wicked smile out of the Queen. Warm hands abandoned their exploration and slid down over the Sheriff's cotton covered mound.

"What are you doing?" the blonde asked with a hint of a whine.

"I don't believe I'm being subtle dear," she replied then pushed the blonde back and pinned her down with the weight of her body. Green eyes opened and looked up at her. She felt the weight of the woman's truest feelings for her, and she was helpless against her desire to kiss her. Leaning in, the Mayor planted a kiss on the Savior's lips and groaned for the effort.

When her lungs burned, she broke their embrace and spoke from her heart, "I love you so much it physically hurts, and I can't imagine ever waking up without you in my bed ever again. You are my everything, Emma Swan. You are my best friend, my world, my savior. You have healed my soul, something I never thought possible. Your love, I feel it all around me. I…"

A warm golden glow of magic gradually increased in its intensity between them interrupting the Queen's love-soaked rambling and both women sat in awe as the glow enveloped them. "Look Emma!"

"I can see it, what is it?" Emma asked with nervous apprehension.

"It's my magic, it's… light!" The surprise was clearly written on the darker woman's face, and Emma smiled with satisfaction.

"See? Good can come from broken! I told you, beautiful, you are worth redemption."

"You are my savior, Emma," the Queen whispered.

Emma wrapped her fingers up in the dark hair of the Mayor and pulled her down into another passionate kiss and then whispered back, "And you are mine, my Queen."

Chapter End Notes

That's all she wrote kids! This one is officially finished with "They lived happily ever after!"
Thanks for hanging in with this for as long as you have
And thanks to my BB for keeping the dream alive xxo

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