Building a Family

by MackenzieW

Summary

Ten-years-old Sophie Mills had a goal for her summer: Find her dad. With her mother, Regina, not wanting to talk about him, she comes up with a plan to find him from the one photograph that may contain him. When she does, she discovers she may have started looking for a dad but found a family instead. OutlawQueen, non-magical AU.

Notes

Based on the following prompt from trueoutlawqueenlove1 on Wattpad: Do u know the film mamma mia?? Well i was thinking if u could do a one shot about that u know Regina is Donna the mother of Sophie and Robin could be Sam. But there if u do the chapter could Regina know who Sophie's father is.

I’ve adjusted a few things. I’ve decided to make Sophie younger and forego the whole marriage aspect. Hope you all enjoy!

This has morphed from a one-shot into a multi-chapter story. I had originally called this "Dad Quest" but since that really only covers the first two chapters, I’ve changed the name. The story is not so much about Sophie's quest to find her dad now but about the family that forms once she finds him.

Thank you to everyone who supported this when I thought it was a one-shot and who wanted more! Please enjoy!
“School’s out!” Henry Swan let out a whoop as they exited the school yard. “Two whole months of freedom!”

Lily Draco shook her head. “Not completely. Mom’s insisting I be productive and so I’m going to be doing odd jobs around her office.”

“Your mom is a lawyer. That’s going to be cool,” Henry said. “And I did manage to convince my mom to go to a basketball camp this summer. What about you, Soph?”

They turned to the third member of their group, Sophie Mills. She sighed, tugging on her braided black hair. “I’m going to be helping Ms. Belle at the library. But there is more…”

She glanced around and then motioned for her friends to get closer. Henry and Lily leaned in as Sophie dropped her voice to a whisper. “I am going on Dad Quest this summer.”

“Dad what?” Lily asked.

Sophie sighed. “I’m going to find my dad this summer.”

“Why?” Lily stopped walking, facing her best friend. She crossed her arms. “You haven’t needed him for ten years. Why bring him into your life now?”

Henry glanced around. “Why don’t we continue this at our clubhouse?”

“Good idea, Henry.” Sophie started walking ahead. She glanced over her shoulder at her friends. “Coming?”

After picking up snacks, the three friends settled into their clubhouse in the woods near the Mills’ house. Lily settled in a worn beanbag chair, staring at Sophie. “So, why do you want to find your father?”

“We’re all friends because we’re children of single mothers,” Sophie began.

Henry interrupted. “I think we’re friends because our mothers are friends.”

“Because they’re single mothers,” Sophie reiterated. “Now, I’m not saying our mothers aren’t amazing because they are. But haven’t you ever wondered about your father?”

“No,” Lily said.

“Yes,” Henry admitted before shrugging. “But with Mom getting closer to Killian, I’ve been fine with not knowing.”

Sophie smiled. “Glad things are working out with him. But I wonder about my dad and I want to know who he is. I feel if I meet him, I’ll understand myself a bit more.”

“We’re ten, Soph. That’s a bit young to be having an identity crisis,” Lily said.

Henry nudged her. “If Sophie wants to find her father, we should support her. That’s what friends do.”
“You’re right,” Lily sighed. She turned to Sophie. “Sorry. So, how are you going to find your father?”

“I’m glad you asked.” Sophie smiled, reaching into her backpack. “Mom’s been cleaning out the attic and I found this while we were up there.”

She held up a picture, taken on a beach. Her mother, Regina, stood in the middle of a group of people as they smiled at the camera. “This was taken the summer before I was born. Specifically, a little over nine months before then. Meaning it’s highly likely that one of the guys in this picture is my dad.”

“But which one?” Henry asked.

Lily leaned closer, pointing to a curly haired man standing next to Regina. “Isn’t that your Uncle Graham?”

“Yes,” Sophie said. “I don’t think he’s my dad. Mom always gets quiet and tense when I ask about my dad. Why would she be like that if he’s been in my life the entire time?”

“Good point. Besides, I don’t see any of him in you,” Henry said.

Lily rolled her eyes. “She’s the spitting image of Aunt Regina, Henry. I doubt we’ll see any of her father in her.”

“You never know,” Henry shot back.

“GUYS!” Sophie waited until her friends looked at her. “Look, Uncle Graham is coming over tonight. Since I’m pretty sure he’s not my dad, maybe he can help me identify these men. It’ll be a start and I’m going to need your support. Can you do that?”

Lily and Henry looked at each other before nodding. “We’ll always support you, Soph. No matter what happens,” she said.

Henry put his hand in the middle. Sophie and Lily placed theirs on top of his. “Here’s to Dad Quest,” he said.

“Uncle Graham!” Sophie threw herself at the man, who caught her easily. She wrapped her arms and legs around him. “I’m so glad to see you!”

“I can tell,” he laughed. He set her down on her feet. “You’re getting a little too big for that, I’m afraid.”

Sophie pouted. “Never.”

“Sophie? Is that you?” Her mother, Regina, walked into the room. She still wore her tan skirt and cream silk top from her day as the town’s mayor. But she had her fuzzy slippers on, promising a quiet evening at home. Sophie loved those.

She kissed her mother’s cheek. “Hi, Mom. How was your day?”

“Busy, what with the festival coming up.” Regina smiled. “But I’ll tell you about that over dinner. You go wash up and then meet Uncle Graham and me in the dining room.”

“Yes, Mom.” Sophie hurried to the bathroom and washed her hands as fast as she could. The smell of her mother’s lasagna hung in the air and her stomach rumbled in anticipation.
She slid into her seat at the table, across from her mother and now next to her uncle. “It smells great, Mom.”

“It does, Regina. You didn’t have to make anything special for me,” Graham said.

Regina waved him off. “Nonsense. Lord knows what you eat out there in the woods, all alone.”

“I eat fine,” Graham stressed. He worked in the state’s gaming commission and preferred to live out in the woods rather than even a small town like Storybrooke. While Sophie herself often preferred to spend time in the woods, she enjoyed civilization a bit more.

Regina served both of them large servings of lasagna. Conversation flowed between them and there was plenty of laughter. When they had eaten their fill of lasagna, she excused herself to fetch the dessert.

Sophie seized her chance, pulling out the picture and showing it to Graham. “I need to ask you about this.”

“Where did you get this?” Graham took the picture from her, frowning.

“I found it in the attic.”

“What do you want to know?” he asked, suspicion coloring his words.

She dropped her voice, afraid her mother would overhear. “Which one is my father?”

Graham was saved from answering as Regina returned with her apple cobbler. He hid the picture, stuffing it in his pocket to Sophie’s dismay. But she said nothing as her mother dished out their dessert, only saying she wanted ice cream instead of whipped cream on hers. As she spooned the delicious cobbler into her mouth, she plotted to get the picture back from her uncle.

That night, after Sophie had gone to bed, Regina stood at the sink washing the dishes. Graham sat at her kitchen table, an open bottle of beer in front of him. “I wish you would let me help,” he said.

“You’re a guest. Guests don’t help.”

Graham sighed. “I’m more than a guest, Regina. I’m a friend. And friends do help.”

“I’m fine.” She glanced over her shoulder at him. “I’m almost done.”

He gave up, recognizing a losing fight. After all, he and Regina had been friends for over ten years now. They were almost like brother and sister at this point. He knew when to push her and when to back off. Now was one of those moments to back off, especially with what he had to discuss with her when she was done. Graham took a swig of beer, hoping for a little liquid confidence.

“Graham? Is something wrong?” Regina slid into the seat next to him, frowning. “You’re awfully quiet.”

Graham pulled out the picture Sophie had given him, sliding it across the table to her. “Your daughter found this.”

Regina picked up the picture and her mouth dropped open. “I forgot this was in the attic. This definitely brings back memories.”
“It was one hell of a summer.”

“You can certainly say that again.” Regina smiled as she laid the picture down.

Graham took another sip before his next comment. “She knows.”

“Knows what?”

“That her father is in the picture.”

Regina frowned. “You told her?”

“No. She did the math, Regina, and figured out that she was born nine months after that summer. She asked me who it is.”

“What did you tell her?” She was panicking, breathing fast and eyes going glassy.

He took her hand. “Nothing.”

She let out a relieved breath. “Good.”

“I think you should tell her.”

“No.”

“She deserves to know.”

“Know what?” Regina stood, pacing the kitchen. “That I fell for a pair of bright blue eyes, an accent and flowery declarations of love? That I believed his promises of forever? That forever turned out to only be until the leaves changed colors? That he never contacted me again, even after I told him I was pregnant? That he abandoned both of us?”

Graham stood, pulling her into an embrace. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to dredge up this old pain. But I do believe Sophie deserves the truth. She’s growing up.”

“I know,” Regina said into his shirt. “But how do I look my little girl in the eyes and tell her that her father didn’t want her?”

“I still can’t believe it. It just doesn’t seem like the man we befriended then.”

Regina pulled away, wiping her face. “Yeah, well, he fooled us all.”

“Maybe he’s changed his mind. Maybe if you and Sophie reach out, he’ll want to be her father now.”

“And what if he doesn’t?” Regina ran a hand through her hair. “She’s at an impressionable age. Who knows what that type of rejection will do to her?”

“She deserves to know.”

Regina nodded. “I’ll tell her in a few years. When she’s old enough to handle the possible rejection.”

Graham didn’t say anything. He just sat back down to finish his beer. Regina though took his hand in hers. “Please, Graham, I need you to promise me that you won’t tell Sophie who her father is.”
“I promise, Regina.”

She kissed his cheek. “I’m going to turn in. Will you be okay?”

“Yes.” He smiled at her. “Good night, Regina.”

Once she was gone, he picked up the photograph again. An idea came to him—he wouldn’t tell Sophie who her father was. But it didn’t mean that he couldn’t leave her a few clues to help her figure it out on her own.

Uncle Graham’s visits were always too short in Sophie’s opinion. She sat on the front stoop, watching as he packed his beat up car. He walked over to her, sitting down. “Come on, Soph, it’s summer. Smile.”

“I wish you could stay longer,” she said.

“Me too.” He nudged her. “Hey, maybe later this summer I could take you, Henry and Lily camping?”

She smiled at last. “I’d like that.”

Graham nodded and she grew serious again. “Did you think about what I asked you?”

“Yes. And I spoke with your mother.”

“You didn’t!” Sophie’s eyes grew wide and she stood. “She’d never approve.”

Graham nodded. “She didn’t. Forbade me from telling you who your father is.”

“Of course she did. She never wants me to find out.” Sophie sat down, slumping over. “It’s not fair.”

“That’s not true. She just wants you to be a bit older.”

“That means never, Uncle Graham.”

“Well, it doesn’t mean I can’t tell you who your father isn’t.” He sighed. “I’m not your father, Sophie. I would’ve been honored, though, had I been.”

Sophie sighed. “Well, I guess that’s a start.”

“Well, there may be something to help you in your clubhouse.” He winked before hugging her. “I’ll see you soon, Soph. I promise.”

Sophie raced toward the clubhouse with Henry and Lily on her heels. They called for her to slow down, but she wanted to discover what Uncle Graham had left for her there. Especially if it could help with Dad Quest.

Bursting into the wooden structure, Sophie found the picture resting on the table. She picked it up as Henry entered behind her. He panted, hands on his knees. “What is it?”

“Uncle Graham promised Mom he wouldn’t tell me who my father was.” Sophie turned to face her friends, the picture in her hand. She was smiling. “But he didn’t promise her he wouldn’t tell me who was in the picture.”

She flipped the picture over to reveal little Post-It notes covering it. Each had a name and was placed under everyone in the shot—male and female. Lily nodded, impressed. “Your Uncle
Graham is pretty clever.”

“Yep. So that means my father is either Will Scarlet, Keith Nott or Robin Locksley,” Sophie announced.

Lily frowned. “So how are you going to figure out who is the lucky winner?”

“I think I need to go to the library,” Sophie said. “Anyone want to come with me?”

Both shook their heads, saying they had their own activities to go to. “But why don’t we meet up at the ice cream shop this afternoon?” Lily suggested.

“Agreed,” Henry and Sophie said.

Sarah Walker, the owner of the ice cream shop, smiled as the three friends entered her establishment. “If it isn’t the Three Musketeers. I was wondering when I would see you this summer.”

“School only let out yesterday, Ms. Walker,” Lily said, leaning up against the glass display case. Sarah laughed. “And I expected you five minutes after school let out.”

“Sorry, Ms. Walker, but we decided to do something else,” Sophie said. “But we’ll more than make up for it now.”

“I’m sure you will. Now, I hope your orders haven’t changed. Chocolate chip mint for Henry.” She handed him the cone and he thanked her.

Lily leaned forward, challenging Sarah. “What do you think I want today?”

“Hmm.” Sarah also leaned forward, scrutinizing the girl. She then turned to her stock and put together a cone. “One scoop cookie dough, one scoop chocolate.”

“You’re good. One day, though, I’ll trip you up.” Lily took the cone and thanked her, moving aside so Sophie could have her turn.

Sarah handed her a cone. “Ever faithful to rocky road.”


“You’re welcome. See you three tomorrow?”

Lily shrugged. “Probably. This is the best ice cream in town.”

The three took their ice creams and left the store. “Want to go walk along the promenade?” Henry suggested.

Sophie and Lily looked at each other and nodded. “Sounds good,” Sophie said, licking her ice cream.

The promenade ran along the beach, giving people a great view of the ocean that bordered Storybrooke. During the summer it was packed with people and this day was no different. The three friends weaved through runners, dog walkers and parents with strollers as they walked along.

“So I did some research in the library today,” Sophie said. “And I found the addresses for my three possible fathers.”
Lily looked impressed. “Nice work. But now what are you going to do?”

“You can’t just send them a letter saying they might be your father,” Henry added. “They won’t believe you and think it’s just a scam.”

“I’ve thought of that and hit upon the perfect solution. The Summer Festival.”

Her two friends stopped and stared at her. Lily sighed. “I’ll ask it. How is that the perfect solution?”

“Because of the ball,” Sophie answered as if it was the most obvious answer in the world. When she realized it wasn’t, she explained: “Mom always invites some of the local business owners to it, you know, to try and convince them to invest in Storybrooke. All three of my potential fathers have businesses in the area.”

“So you sneak their business names on your mother’s list and hope that her name lures them here,” Henry concluded.

Lily nodded. “Never mind. That is the perfect solution.”

“Of course it is,” Sophie said. “Now I just have to sneak their names onto the list without Mom noticing.”

The Summer Festival was the busiest time of year for Storybrooke. Regina hated that she had to spend two weeks of her daughter’s summer vacation constantly on the run, but Sophie was always an understanding girl. “You always make it up to me later in the summer,” she said over dinner. “By the way, where are we going for vacation this year?”

“It’s a surprise,” Regina lied. She hadn’t had time to plan one yet. Just another way she was failing her daughter this year. Perhaps Ruby could start looking into that for her.

Regina tucked some of her hair behind her ear and smiled at her daughter. “So, how are you enjoying volunteering at the library?”

“It’s good. Miss Belle is really knowledgeable and it’s kinda fun to look at some of the old records.” Sophie leaned closer. “Today, she showed me something called microfiche. Have you ever heard of that?”

“Yes, I have. I had to use it for quite a few college presentations.”

Sophie smiled, leaning closer. “What was college like for you?”

“I enjoyed it a lot,” Regina replied. “It was my first taste of freedom and I enjoyed being able to make my own decisions. I also made some great friends, like your Aunt Kathryn, who made the experience all the better. But I also learned a lot, which is important.”

“Of course.” Sophie rolled her eyes.

Regina let it slide as she sipped her wine. “Why do you want to know?”

“Because you don’t really talk about when you were younger,” Sophie said. “Grandma was the only one who told me any stories and now she’s gone.”

Regina paused, her mother’s death still fresh. She and Cora hadn’t had the greatest of relationships, but it had improved after Sophie’s birth. It was as if something had switched in Cora
when she became a grandmother. She was loving and generous toward Sophie and helped Regina whenever she could. It had come as a shock when her heart had given out, leaving Regina and Sophie reeling.

Putting down her wine glass, Regina took her daughter’s hand. “Well, that’s going to change. I may not be able to tell you everything, but I will try to tell you more.”

“Except who my father is.”

“Yes,” Regina said. “You do understand I have my reasons, right?”

Sophie nodded, though she frowned. “Are you going to tell me them?”

“When you’re older.”

“Figures.” Sophie crossed her arms.

Regina sighed, praying her daughter would understand when she was older. Until now, there was only one thing to do. “How about some pie?” she offered. “A la mode?”

“You’re trying to bribe me?”

“Are you really going to turn down pie and ice cream?” Regina raised an eyebrow.

Sophie shook her head. “You know my weaknesses too well. I don’t know yours.”

“Yes, you do.” Regina tilted her daughter’s head up, kissing her forehead. “I love you, Sophie. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

Throwing her arms around her mother’s neck, Sophie hugged her. “I love you too, Mom.”

Regina hoped her daughter understood her reasons to keep the truth about her father a secret for now. Maybe she would even stop asking, at least for a little bit.

“Mayor Mills? Are you busy?” Ruby knocked on her office door. “Do you have time for some questions about the festival?”

Regina glanced up. “All my time right now is devoted to the festival. Come on in.”

“Great. There are a few invoices I need you to review and sign. And the catering hall sent over the menu for the ball for you to finalize.” Ruby handed her the menu.

She glanced over it. “When do they want this back?”

“They said tomorrow, but I’m sure they’ll give you a day or two.”

“Well, look at this. Regina Mills, Mayor.” A tall, lanky man with dark hair cut short and a smirk on his face leaned against her door. “Who’d have thunk?”

Regina’s mouth fell open as she took him in. “Will Scarlet? Is that you?”

“Absolutely.” He held out his arms, doing a little spin as he approached her desk. “It’s been too long.”

“It has.” Regina stood, hugging him. Ruby made her excuses and hurried from the room, closing the door behind her.
Will took a seat in front of Regina’s desk as she continued to smile at him. “What brings you to Storybrooke?” she asked.

“This.” He pulled out the invitation to the Summer Festival. “I got it the other day, saw your name and figured I should come and catch up.”

Regina took the invitation and looked it over. “You own the White Rabbit animal shelter?”

“Yeah. Finally got off my arse and did something good, right?”

“I’m so proud of you,” Regina said, putting the invite down. “And if I had known you owned it… well, this invite might’ve come a few years earlier.”

“If I knew you were the mayor, I would’ve visited sooner.” Will leaned back. “You see anyone else? You know, from the old gang?”

“Kathryn and I still keep in touch and visit each other when we can. And Graham’s with the gaming commission, so I see him periodically here in Storybrooke. Cru and Ursula send e-mails or postcards every so often, but nothing consistent. As for the others, no. You?”

“Not as many as you,” Will said with a chuckle. He grew serious, regarding Regina with a calculated look. “I’m still close to one person. He didn’t go back to England either, Regina.”

She fell silent and Will pressed further. “I don’t get it. What happened between you two?”

“What does he say?”

“Won’t talk about it,” Will said. “And I’m getting the sense you’re not going to either.”

Regina shrugged. “Not much to say. It ended.”

“I don’t believe it. Not the way you two were. There has to be more to the story.” Will frowned.

Her door banged open as Sophie charged into the room. “Mom, can I sleep over at Aunt Mal’s? Please?”

“Sophie Cora Mills, what have I told you about knocking?” Regina glared at her daughter.

Sophie bowed her head. “Sorry, but it was kinda an emergency.”

“A sleepover with Lily is not an emergency.”

“Aunt Mal needs an answer like now and Ruby’s not putting any of your calls through.”

“That’s because I’m meeting with someone.” Regina motioned to Will.

Sophie turned to him and grew sheepish. “Oh, sorry.”

“That’s okay. Name’s Will Scarlet.” He held out his hand. “Your mum and I go way back.”

“Cool. Welcome to Storybrooke,” Sophie said before turning back to her mother. She clasped her hands together. “So can I sleep over at Aunt Mal’s? Please?”

Regina sighed. “Okay, you can sleep over at Aunt Mal’s. I’ll let her know it’s okay.”

“Thank you, Mom! You’re the greatest.” Sophie hugged Regina, beaming. She then turned to Will. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Scarlet.”
“You too, Sophie. I hope I see you around more.” He watched as she left, closing the door behind her. Will swiveled back in his seat. “She has his smile, complete with his dimples.”

“I know,” Regina replied, softly. “She has his heart too, the desire to help those who can’t help themselves.”

Will nodded. “I’m glad you didn’t try to deny who her father was though I doubt she knows. He certainly doesn’t or he’d have told me.”

“I sent him a letter. He never responded. That told me everything I needed to know.”

“But that doesn’t make sense. He adored you and I really thought if anyone could be together forever, it was you two. And he’s a great father to Roland…”

“He has a son?” Regina didn’t know why that thought sent her spiraling into sadness. “And a wife, I assume?”

Will fell silent. “I think you should talk to him. Tell him about Sophie. He has a right to know.”

“He forfeited that right ten years ago.” Regina stood. “If that’s all, Mr. Scarlet, I have a phone call to make.”

He sighed, standing as well. “Please, Regina. It’s been too long and I would love to be your friend again.”


“Sounds great.”

“There’s just one thing. You can’t tell Sophie about her dad.”

Will nodded. “I get it. You should be the one to tell her. And I can only promise that I won’t tell him while I’m Storybrooke since this is something I shouldn’t do over the phone. But once I leave…”

“I understand,” Regina said softly. There was a chance she would have to tell Sophie sooner about her father but reminded herself that there was a greater chance that she wouldn’t. That he wouldn’t want some summer time fling ruining the perfect family he seemed to have now.

Sophie dropped her overnight bag and sleeping bag in Lily’s room before crowing, “Dad Quest is off to great start.”

“What do you mean?” Lily raised an eyebrow as she laid on her bed. She rested her chin on a pillow.

“One of my candidates is sitting in Mom’s office.”

Lily sat up. “Really? Which one?”

“Will Scarlet.” Sophie jumped on her friend’s bed. “He seems pretty nice and he’s British.”

“So you could be British?”

Sophie nodded. “I could be related to the royal family!”
“Woah there. I think you’re getting ahead of yourself. He might not be your dad after all.”

“I know. But he might be able to tell me more about who is.”

“If Aunt Regina doesn’t convince him otherwise,” Lily pointed out.

Sophie sighed. “True. But I have a really good feeling about this. I think Dad Quest may yield the desired results.”

“I hope so.” Lily scooted closer to her friend. “I know I gave you a hard time before about this, but I really want you to find your dad too. I just hope you’re happy when all is said and done.”

“Me too,” Sophie whispered. “Me too.”
Sophie was thrilled the next day when Regina told her that Will would be joining them for dinner. “Great. I can get stories about you out of him,” she said, teasing her mother.

Regina smiled before frowning. “I’ve already spoken to Will about your father.”

“I figured,” Sophie sighed. “He’s not going to tell me, is he?”

“No. I’ve asked him not to.”

She parked the car by the promenade, but didn’t move to get out. First, she turned to Sophie. “I’m trying not to be the bad guy.”

“I don’t think you’re the bad guy. I just want to understand why you don’t want me to know who my father is.”

Regina sighed. “Maybe it is time for us to have this talk. Just…after the Summer Festival, okay? When we have all the time in the world together.”

“Okay. I’m going to hold you to it though,” Sophie said, glad that her mother was softening up. Maybe she would tell her the name of her father before she had to track down her other two candidates.

They got out of the car to find Will waiting for them on the promenade. He held two bouquets. “Flowers for two pretty women,” he said, giving them to mother and daughter.

“You’re still the charmer, aren’t you?” Regina teased him, smiling.

Will laughed. “I am only telling the truth though, Regina.”

“Thank you,” Sophie said, clutching her yellow roses closer. “These are great. How did you know they were my favorite?”

“They were your mother’s,” Will replied.

Regina smiled. “Still are.”

Sophie smiled as well, putting another checkmark into the mental columns she kept in her head. Will moved up as her potential father. After all, why else would he know her mother’s favorite flowers?

Regina urged them forward, reminding them that they had reservations and a fifteen minute walk ahead of them. Sophie walked between the two, holding her mother’s hand while Will kept one of his on her back. As they strolled along the promenade, she wondered if this was what it felt like to have a proper family.

“Regina Mills? Why you haven’t aged a day,” a deep male voice said from behind them.

Sophie felt both her mother and Will tense up as they turned around to look at the voice’s owner. He was taller than her mother, with brown hair brushed into a fancy hairstyle. Though he smiled, there was something about that seemed off to her. She shrunk into her mother’s side and Regina
wrapped her arm around her.

“Keith Nott. What brings you to Storybrooke?” she asked.

He held up one of the invites Sophie now wished she hadn’t sent him. There was no way he was her father. That her mother did that mysterious thing adults were always vague about to create her with him.

Regina frowned as she took it from him. “Nott’s Bounty Hunting?”

“Yes,” Keith said, puffing out his chest. “And I must say I’m one of the best in the business.”

Will rolled his eyes. “It seems to suit you.”

“Will Scarlet.” Keith looked him up and down with a cold, calculating look that sent shivers down Sophie’s spine. “I’m surprised I haven’t had to track you down yet. Been able to keep dodging the law?”

“I’ve gone legit, not that it’s any of your business.” Will stared the man down, arms crossed.

Sophie felt her mother push her toward Will. “Can you take Sophie to the restaurant, Will? I’ll join you in a little bit.”

“Of course. But if you’re not there in ten minutes, I’m sending someone after you, yeah?” He glared at Keith as he took the girl’s hand in his.

She clutched onto his hand though she didn’t want to leave her mother. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw her mother stand rigid and with her arms crossed. She was uncomfortable around Keith as well.

“Maybe we should go back,” she told Will. “Keep Mom safe.”

Will stopped, hugging her. “Don’t worry. Your mom can protect herself. And we set up a check in time, yeah? I’m sure she’ll make it, but if she doesn’t…”

“We send Aunt Emma after her? She’s the sheriff,” Sophie said.

He nodded. “We send your aunt after her. Now, tell me about yourself. What’s your favorite subject in school?”

With one last glance over her shoulder, Sophie couldn’t see her mother anymore. So she focused on Will’s distraction. “Well, I really like math. My friends think I’m nuts but I understand it better than they do.”

Will laughed. “Well, aren’t you a little genius? Then again, your mother was always good at math. She just liked political science a bit more.”

“She still uses math when she has to put together the budget,” Sophie said. “This year, she let me watch and I almost understood it.”

“Maybe you’ll be a mayor like her, then?”

Sophie paused, before shaking her head. “I don’t know what I want to be yet, but I know that’s not it.”

“Well, if you’re good at math and you like it, then you have a lot of options in front of you.” Will winked at her. “Dream big, little one.”
They arrived at the restaurant and were seated at a table by a window, giving them a view of the setting sun as it sunk below the ocean. Sophie sighed. “I wish I could draw. This would make a beautiful painting.”

“You ever take a class?” Will asked after ordering drinks for them.

“We have art class in school—Mom’s really great about making sure the budget supports the arts—and she let me take a few classes last summer. And I was okay, but nothing amazing. Not like my friend Henry.”

“He a good artist then?”

Sophie nodded. “And a good writer. Our teacher submitted one of his short stories this year and it got published in a magazine.”

“You sound proud of him,” Will said.

“Of course. He’s my friend.”

Their drinks arrived as Regina walked up to the table. Relief filled Sophie and she smiled at her mother. “You made it!”

“Of course. Keith Nott isn’t much a threat.” Regina sat down, tucking her daughter’s hair behind her ear. “Sorry to worry you, sweetie.”

Will leaned closer, handing her a glass of wine. “You sure you okay?”

She nodded. “I just need to figure out how he got an invite, but otherwise, everything’s fine.”

Sophie slumped down, focusing on her soda as she prayed no one noticed how guilty she looked. She regretted sending that invite and prayed her mother had Keith Nott escorted out of Storybrooke. Right now, she’d be fine just getting to know Will and not even meeting Robin Locksley. What if he was worse than Keith?

As dinner wore on, Sophie decided she liked Will more and more. He was funny and seemed like a good person. And he showed interest in both her and her mother, caring about them. She started to really hope he was her father.

“Sophie, can you put these books back on the shelf for me? I have to organize the reading circle.” Belle handed her a small pile of books.

She nodded. “Do you need any other help?”

“No, but keep your eye out for any little kids who might need it. Okay?” Belle smiled at Sophie.

The girl balanced the books as she walked over to a bookcase. She spied a small group of boys who were in the grade ahead of her at Storybrooke Academy, standing in a circle. One held a stuffed monkey in the air as the others laughed. As she watched, a small boy—maybe a first grader at best—jumped up, trying to grab the monkey.

“Come on, baby. What’s the matter? Too small?” the bully sneered.

“Give it back!” The smaller boy jumped more, his dark curls bouncing with every attempt to retrieve his toy. “It’s mine.”
“Only babies have stuffed animals. Don’t you think it’s time to grow up?”

“Maybe you should grow up first,” Sophie said, putting the books down and charging over to the group. “Picking on a small kid isn’t very mature.”

The boys turned on her. “Keep out of this. This doesn’t concern you, Princess.”

“I’m helping Miss Belle in the library and I have to help the little kids. He looks like he needs help so yes, this does concern me.” Sophie crossed her arms, staring him down. “So back off, Trevor.”

Trevor advanced on her, glowering. “You think you’re all that because you’re the mayor’s kid. You’re just a spoiled little princess.”

“Give me the monkey, Trevor,” Sophie repeated as their victim darted behind her legs.

He rolled his eyes, shoving the toy at her. “Fine. I’m bored of this anyway.”

“Good, because I can use three strong boys like you in the storage room.” Belle appeared, almost out of nowhere. She smiled at the three. “Why don’t you follow me?”

They groaned but filed after Belle as Sophie glared at them. Once they were gone, she turned to the little boy and held out his monkey. “Here you go.”

“Thank you.” He hugged the toy close. “I’m Roland and this is Mr. Bananas.”

Sophie smiled, introducing herself. “If you or Mr. Bananas need anything, let me know.”

Roland turned into her little shadow for the next couple of hours. Wherever she went, he followed. He didn’t bother her, asking only a few questions and help once. Most times he just sat down by her, reading a few books she had chosen for him.

He was a sweet kid and she liked having him around, even if it meant helping with an odd word here or there. Every time she was rewarded with a bright smile and an adoring gaze. She wondered if that was what it was like to have a sibling.

“Roland?” He looked up at her voice, excited and she smiled. “Do you want to go to the arts and crafts table?”

Roland nodded. “Will you help me with it? If it’s hard?”

“Of course. But I have a feeling you’re an arts and crafts champ.”

He giggled, taking her hand and letting her lead him to the table where the other little kids sat making whatever craft Belle had decided on for the day. They sat on the carpet next to each other and Sophie spent the next hour helping him.

“So did you discover who invited that bounty hunter?” Mal took a sip of her pinot noir as she sat at lunch with Emma and Regina.

Regina sighed. “I don’t have definitive proof, but I have a strong suspicion it was my daughter.”

“Sophie?” Emma frowned as she leaned forward. “Why?”

“I’ve told you she’s asking about her father more and more. A few weeks ago, she discovered an old picture and realized it was taken around the time she was conceived. It was a group shot, though, not one of just me and her father.” Those were locked away in a metal box buried so deep in Regina’s closet, Sophie would’ve needed mining equipment to find it.
Emma tilted her head. “So you think she identified her potential fathers, got their business addresses and snuck them onto the invite list?”

“She always has been clever,” Mal said, impressed. She reached across the table, taking Regina’s hand. “Are you okay with him possibly coming to Storybrooke?”

Mal and Emma knew her story, Emma’s being somewhat similar. Neal, though, had left her with not just a child and a broken heart, but with stolen goods as well. Mal had taken on her case as a young idealistic public defender and managed to get Emma off with probation. When Mal discovered she was pregnant after a one night stand, she felt a kinship with the pregnant blonde teen. She took Emma to the same ob-gyn Regina used and an unlikely but beautiful friendship was born in the doctor’s waiting room.

As Emma took her other hand, Regina once again wondered how she would’ve survived motherhood without them. They had always been there for her, just as she was for them. And they would be with her for this.

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “It’s a great unknown. It could be like reuniting with Keith, loud and full of hatred. Or it could be like reuniting with Will—easy though not without tension.”

“Well, maybe he won’t come,” Emma said.

A hearty chuckle floated past their table and Regina found herself transported back eleven years to a beach, gazing into a pair of eyes blue enough to rival the ocean. Eyes she met now across the dining room as they widened in recognition. His smile softened from amused to fond as he excused himself from the table he had been sitting at.

The years had been kind to him. He had been fit back then but he had clearly kept up his routine, judging by his biceps. His face had lost its boyish charm but now held more of a rugged appeal. Scruff covered his face she found herself wondering what it would’ve been like to feel it scratching against her skin as he kissed his way down her naked body…

Stop. You should not be lusting after the man who abandoned you when you were pregnant. Keep it together.

“Regina,” he greeted, British accent still intact despite living in the states for over a decade.

She gave him a polite smile. “Robin. I see you accepted the invitation.”

“Well, I couldn’t resist when I saw your name.” His voice softened, the flirting tone replaced by sincerity. “You look good, Regina.”

“You too,” she said before introducing Mal and Emma. The two women shook his hand though their smiles remained cool and polite.

He cleared his throat and she knew he was nervous, though she wasn’t sure if it was because of her or the dislike radiating off her friends. Regina frowned. “Is there anything you need help with?”

“I was hoping we could have lunch,” he said. “We have a lot to discuss.”

Regina nodded. “I’ll go back to my office and check my schedule. My assistant Ruby will call you.”

“Of course. I’ll leave you ladies to you meal.” He nodded, returning to his table.
Emma followed him with her eyes until he sat down. She then turned back to Regina. “Wow, Regina, you certainly know how to pick them. He’s downright sexy.”

“I know,” Regina sighed. “Do you know how hard it’s going to be to stay mad at him when he looks and acts like that? I’m afraid I’ll fall for him all over again. Maybe I shouldn’t go to lunch with him.”

“No, you should,” Emma insisted.

Mal nodded. “I agree. You deserve answers and this is the best way to get them.”

“And who knows? He may show his true colors and any lingering feelings will vanish,” Emma said.

Regina nodded but frowned. “But what if it backfires and I end up more in love with him? Especially now that he’s married.”

“I didn’t see a wedding ring,” Emma replied softly.

Mal kicked Emma, judging by the younger blonde’s wince. “You’re not helping,” Mal hissed.

As Emma shrank back, Mal turned to Regina. “Whatever happens, I know you will always act in Sophie’s best interest. And we will always have you back.”

Regina smiled, nodding. “You two are the best friends anyone could ask for.”

“Thank you, but can we stop this before we all start crying in public?” Emma asked.

Laughing, the friends turned back to their meal and lighter conversations.

Sophie met up with Henry and Lily outside the ice cream parlor. Lily crossed her arms. “You’re late.”

“Sorry. I had a run in with Trevor and his crew earlier. I had to wait until they were gone.”

Henry frowned. “How did you get messed up with them?”

“Let’s get ice cream and I’ll tell you everything.” Sophie reached for the door when a familiar little voice called out her name.

She glanced down the street to see Roland racing toward her. He pulled a tall man with him and her heart skipped a beat. The blond hair was shorter, the face no longer clean-shaven, and he was older, but she recognized Robin Locksley nonetheless. Her new little buddy had a connection to Potential Dad #3. What were the odds?

Roland skidded to a halt in front of her, smiling. “Hi, Sophie!”

“Hey, Roland,” she said. “Nice to see you again.”

“This is my Papa,” he replied, tugging on the man’s hand. “Papa, this is Sophie. She saved Mr. Bananas from the big kids and is my friend.”

His father smiled, holding out his hand to her. “Nice to meet you, Sophie.”

“You too, Mr…?” She knew who he was but she wanted to hear it from him.
“Call me Robin,” he insisted, enough confirmation for her. He glanced at Henry and Lily. “Are these your friends?”

Lily and Henry introduced themselves before she leaned closer to Sophie. “This is why you got tangled up with Trevor? Because you were playing Superwoman again?”

“Sophie’s more of a Wonder Woman,” Henry interjected.

Robin laughed. “Well, can I buy the heroine and her sidekicks some ice cream as a thank you?”

“Cool! Thank you,” Henry said.

Lily frowned though. “Listen here, I am not her sidekick. I am her handler. Got it?”

“Of course. My apologies.” Robin gave a little bow.

Roland groaned. “Can we get ice cream now?”

“Where are your manners, young man?” Robin frowned.

“Can we get ice cream now, please?” Roland stressed the last word.

Lily smiled, wrapping her arm around the boy. “You’re okay, kid.”

They walked into Any Given Sundae and Sophie saw Sarah’s eyes narrow despite her smile. “The three Musketeers…and some friends?”

Roland frowned, looking up at Sophie. “What’s a Musketeer?”

“I’ll tell you later, okay?” Sophie told him. She looked up at Sarah. “It’s okay, Ms. Walker.”

Sarah nodded but still regarded Robin with some suspicion as she served them. She handed Henry his chocolate chip mint and correctly guessed that Lily wanted Dulce de leche that day. “Are you sure you’re not a witch?” Lily asked as she took the cone.

“No,” Sarah said with a laugh. “Just perceptive.”

As Lily moved away, Sarah turned to the remaining three. “I know Sophie loves Rocky Road, so what will you two have?”

“I love Rocky Road too!” Roland exclaimed, standing on his tiptoes to see over the counter. “So does Papa!”

“Talk about coincidences, yeah?” Robin smiled at Sophie, who wondered if it was really a coincidence after all.

Sarah handed Roland and Sophie their cones and Robin sent them to sit while he paid for their ice cream. Lily and Henry had already claimed a table and Roland hopped into a seat next to Sophie. His little legs swung happily as he licked his cone. “It’s cool we like the same flavor,” he told her.

“Yeah,” Lily said, staring at her friend. “Imagine that.”

“Here you go,” Robin said, placing some napkins on the table. He took one to wipe his son’s face.

Robin seemed to be a good father and she wondered if he would’ve been the same had he been her father. Would they have shared Rocky Road cones on nights when her mother had to work late? Would he had held her hand when they went somewhere and smiled at her like she was his
everything, just like he did with Roland?

He sat down next to Roland, studying Sophie. She tried to act nonchalant but her stomach was doing flip-flops. Did he think she looked familiar? Or did he see her mother in her? Was he figuring out that he could be her father? Or was Will her father and he now knew it?

“Well, Sophie, I must thank you for stepping in when those bullies picked on Roland,” Robin said, running a hand through his son’s curls.

Lily rolled her eyes. “We told you. She’s Wonder Woman. If she thinks there’s an injustice going on, she’s going to do everything she can to right it.”

“What?” Robin smiled, seeming impressed. “Sounds like me when I was younger.”

Sophie’s eyes widened. “Really?”

“Yes,” he replied. “I once protested an exam because the professor put question on it that were from a unit we hadn’t yet covered.”

“Sophie did that this year,” Henry said. “Almost got detention but Aunt Regina and Aunt Mal went in and had a discussion with the principal.”

Lily nodded. “Mom and Aunt Regina got the principal to throw the test out and we got to take a new one with only the things we had learned. Everyone passed that one.”

An odd look came over Robin’s eyes as he glanced at Sophie. But it passed before she could think more of it and he smiled. “Well, that turned out better for you than it did for me. My hand still hurts from all the lines I had to write.”

They laughed as Robin flexed his hands a few times, wincing dramatically. Under the table, both Lily and Henry kicked her and she knew why. Robin was rising very high on her list and she believed there was a strong possibility that he was her father.

And despite really liking Will, she found she was really glad it could be Robin.

Regina heard the front door open and close. Taking a deep breath, she called out: “Sophie? Can you come in here?”

Her daughter entered the dining room and frowned. “What’s going on?”

“We need to talk.”

Fear flashed in Sophie’s brown eyes as she sat next to her mother. “Is this about me messing with the invitation list?”

Regina’s eyebrow went up at her daughter’s confession. It appeared her suspicions were right. “Not now but we will talk about that, young lady.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Sophie sank back in her seat.

“But this does have to do with your father. It’s time for me to tell you about him.”

Sophie sat up. “Because he’s here?”

Regina nodded. “And because it’s time.”

She put down a picture, a group shot of everyone from that fateful summer gathered outside the
villas they had rented. “This was taken shortly after I graduated college.”

“You spent the entire summer at the beach? Cool.”

Regina laughed. “I spent it on the Cape, doing an internship with the mayor of a small town. All of us in that picture were working in that town in some way or another and we all rented places at the same complex.”

“And that’s how you met my dad?” At Regina’s nod, Sophie pressed on. “What was he doing?”

Regina smiled. “He was working as a counselor at a local day camp. He’s an expert archer.”

“Cool.”

“I thought the same,” Regina admitted. “I liked that he cared so much about the campers. And that he was funny, sweet and friendly. The accent didn’t hurt either.”

“So he’s British?” Sophie looked over the picture. “Will or Robin, then?”

“Robin,” Regina replied, softly. She watched as something that looked like happiness crossed Sophie’s face.

Filing that away for later, she moved on with her story. “I never believed in love at first sight until I met him. I looked into those blue eyes and never wanted to look away again.”

“Sounds romantic,” Sophie sighed.

“It was,” Regina agreed. “We spent as much time together as possible. He made me feel special and cherished. We spoke about having a future beyond the summer and I really thought it would be forever.”

Silence fell as she tried to keep her feelings under control. Crying now wouldn’t help. She had to finish the story for Sophie’s sake…and her own.

“Mom?” Sophie asked. “Do you need a break?”

Regina let out a laugh. Her sweet daughter was trying to take care of her. She took Sophie’s hand. “No, I’m fine.

“Summer ended and we all needed to face the real world. I got a job here in Storybrooke and moved back with your grandmother until I could afford a place of my own. Robin had to deal with his visa and didn’t know where he would end up.”

“So you had no way to keep in touch with him?”

“Well, we did,” Regina said. “He had my address and phone number. He gave me the address of a friend of his, saying I could mail my letters there until he had something more permanent.”

“Did you send him letters?”

Regina nodded. “A month passed with no word from him and I told myself he was still getting everything settled. That he would write soon enough. But after the second month went by without any word, I started to realize that maybe it hadn’t been forever after all.”

“What happened then?” Sophie pressed.

“I got sick,” Regina replied. “I thought it was a stomach bug I couldn’t shake so I went to the
doctor. And he told me it wasn’t a stomach bug but you.”

Sophie smiled. “Did you tell Robin?”

“I tried to by writing him one last letter, asking him to come to Storybrooke so we could be a family like we wanted.”

“And he never responded,” Sophie said.

Regina sighed. “I thought he had rejected me…and you.”

“Is that why you wouldn’t tell me about him?”

“Yes,” she said, taking her daughter’s chin in her hand. “I couldn’t tell you that your father didn’t want you.”

Sophie nodded, before sighing. “I met him today.”

“Robin?” Regina frowned. “Where?”

She told her mother about everything that had happened that day. Regina’s heart beat faster at the thought of Robin already suspecting that Sophie was his. But she still smiled, proud of her daughter. “Good for you, for standing up for Roland,” she said.

“Thank you,” Sophie said, beaming. Her smile faltered. “I’m sorry, Mom, about sneaking those named onto your list.”

Regina nodded. “I will be doling out a punishment after the festival. I’m thinking extra chores are in order.”

“What about community service?”

“It’s supposed to be a punishment. You like helping others.”

Sophie shrugged. “I get that from both my parents.”

“More so your father.” Regina brushed some stray hairs away from Sophie’s face. “I do have to thank you, though. By bringing your father here, I finally had to face my past. And doing so helped me learn the truth.”

“The truth?” Sophie asked, scrunching up her face.

Regina nodded, taking her daughter’s hand. “There’s a lot I’ve shielded you from, not just about your father but about your grandmother as well.”

“What about Grandmother?” Sophie asked with a frown.

“I want you to remember that she loved you. And that she was a good person.” Regina took a deep breath. “But she wasn’t always a great mother. She did want what was best for me but she went about it in the wrong way.”

“There’s a wrong way?”

“Yes,” Regina replied with a nod. “Grandmother had a clear plan about what she wanted my life to be, whether I wanted it or not.”

“But what does that have to do with Robin?” Sophie asked.
“I guess he didn’t fit her plan.” Regina pulled out an envelope. It had the address Robin had given her written in her cursive as well as her mother’s address in the corner. A stamp was still stuck to it and it was unopened. The only thing missing was the post mark.

“You father didn’t abandon you, Sophie,” she explained. “He never knew you existed.”
Part 3: Father-Daughter Reunion

Regina had arrived at the restaurant early, nervous and eager to get the meal over with. She didn’t know how this would play out and that frightened her. It was times like this that helped her understand why her mother tried to control everything, even if she didn’t approve of it.

She spotted Robin walking toward her table, his face blank. He had always worn his heart on his sleeve and she had liked that she didn’t have to guess how he was feeling. When had that changed?

He sat down across from her. “Hello, Regina.”

“Robin,” she replied with a nod.

“So where do you want to begin? Talk about my camp and my plans to possibly bring it to Storybrooke? Or do you want to go straight to Sophie?” He leveled her with a hard gaze.

“I think it’s best if we go straight to Sophie,” she said, swallowing. “She told me you two met. Thank you for treating her.”

“Of course. Roland adores her.” He paused before saying: “She looks like you.”

“She takes more after you personality-wise though.”

Robin nodded. “I realized that yesterday.”

Silence descended upon the table, Robin glaring at her while she tried not to throw up from how nervous she was. At last, he asked in a low voice: “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought I did,” Regina replied. “I thought you rejected us.”

“Really?” Robin leaned back, arms crossed. “Or did you move on?”

“Me? I was pregnant. Hard to move on when your stomach keeps getting larger and larger. Men don’t tend to flock to that,” she hissed.

Robin frowned. “I went to your mother’s, when I hadn’t heard from you. It was going to be a surprise for Christmas. She said you were on a date.”

“Christmas?” Regina frowned then, shaking her head. “The only thing I did that year was go to the office Christmas party. Alone.”

“I saw you a few days later with Graham.” He nearly growled the name. “You were strolling arm-
in-arm.”

“Graham’s a friend. He’s only ever been a friend! And I was pregnant. My center of gravity was shifting with the addition of a growing life form and the pregnancy was effecting my balance. I was holding onto everyone at that time so I didn’t hurt myself or Sophie. Not to mention it was probably icy since it was December.” It was Regina’s turn to glare at him. “So you drove away because of Graham?”

“I drove away because you never came to see me. I could take the hint,” Robin replied.

She sighed. “I didn’t know you were in town. Mother never told me.”

“Of course not.” He let out a humorless chuckle. “Do I want to know why?”

“You had no family connections and no ties to the community. You had no set address and no career to speak of.”

Robin’s frown deepened. “I didn’t think it mattered to you.”

“It didn’t!” Regina realized she was shouting when the people by them stopped talking. She untucked her hair to hide her reddening cheeks. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to shout.”

“It’s understandable. Emotions are high.” Robin took a sip of his water and she noticed his hand shook.

She pressed on. “I didn’t care about all of that. My mother did. You didn’t meet the dream husband she had in her head for me. So you had to go.”

“Which is why she didn’t tell you I visited. She probably didn’t tell you about the ten calls I made to your house either, I assume?” When Regina nodded, he blew out in exasperation. “And the letters?”

She reached into her black leather bag and placed a stack of letters wrapped in a rubber band on the table. None were open and they were all postmarked almost eleven years earlier from a town not far from Storybrooke. Each was addressed to Regina in Robin’s block print.

“These are them,” he confirmed, running his thumb over the edges. He looked up at her. “Your mum nicked them?”

“She did.” Regina then tossed a second bundle down. “These too.”

“I’m guessing those are the letters you thought you sent me?”

Regina nodded before groaning. “I was so stupid. I should’ve used another mailbox. No, I should’ve taken them to the post office myself.”

“And I should’ve actually talked to you rather than taken your mother at her word or let myself misconstrue everything. Maybe things would’ve been different,” Robin said with a sad smile.

Regina shrugged. “Maybe. But then you wouldn’t have your family today.”

“Roland?” Robin smiled as he nodded. “True.”

“And his mother.”

Robin’s smile fell and his eyes darkened. “Roland’s mother isn’t in the picture.”
“Oh.” She glanced down at his hand and saw that Emma had been right—there was no wedding band on his left ring finger. Curiosity overwhelmed her but she fought it, knowing she had forfeited the right to ask him for more details. She could only stick with Sophie.

He seemed to agree. “So, Sophie. Does she know?”

“She does now,” Regina said. “She only had suspicions when you got her the ice cream yesterday. Was that when you figured it out?”

He nodded. “As I said, she looks like you. And when her friend Henry mentioned an ‘Aunt Regina,’ I realized I wasn’t just imagining things. Then I did the math and realized I was most likely the father. Will confirmed it.”

“He wanted to tell you. But not over the phone.”

Robin nodded. “He told me and I understood. I don’t think I would’ve been happy if he had told me that way.”

“I can arrange for you two to meet officially as father and daughter,” Regina offered. “Are you free tomorrow?”

“Not in the morning. I’m meeting some potential investors then. But maybe afternoon is better. I can then take her and Roland to dinner…if that’s okay?”

Regina nodded, smiling again. “She’d love it.”

“Good.” Robin leaned back and it seemed some of the tension had dissipated. “So do you want to pretend this is a professional lunch and talk about my organization? Or do you want to keep talking about Sophie? Because honestly, I could do both.”

“While I could talk about Sophie all day, I’d love to hear about your camp. It’s for inner-city and underprivileged youths, right?”

“Yes, though it’s really a series of camps I’ve set up over New England. I really put my camp experience to use, huh?” Robin smiled. “Imagine going back eleven years and telling my younger self that?”

Regina laughed. “I think I would’ve believed it.”

“Yeah, you were my greatest supporter.” His smile faltered and his eyes were downcast. “Though I guess if I could go back, I’d tell me a few other things.”

“Me too,” Regina agreed softly.

Awkward silence descended upon them. Regina casted about to find anything for them to discuss, ready to tell him Sophie’s entire life story if need be, when she spotted Emma striding toward her. She frowned as her friend approached. “Emma, what’s wrong?”

“There’s been an incident at the library. Sophie’s been hurt,” Emma said.

“What?” Robin and Regina both jumped from their seats.

Regina’s heart pounded in her chest as different scenarios passed through her head. “What happened? How bad is she hurt?”

Emma held up her hands, trying to calm Regina down. “Nothing too serious, but you need to
come now. I’ll drive you.”

“I have to settle the bill,” Regina said, pulling at her purse to find her wallet. Her hands shook and she dropped the bag a few times.

Robin placed his hand over hers. “I’ll settle up here and meet you at the library. Sophie needs you.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, blinking back her tears. She took Emma’s arm as the sheriff escorted her from the restaurant to take her to her child.

Sophie knew Trevor and his gang were up to no good. Every instinct she had told her that. When she had seen them lurking about, she should’ve gone to Ms. Belle. But she didn’t think they would be so stupid.

She should’ve known better.

By the time Trevor had been on top of her, it had been too late. He had grabbed her and started to push her between his friends. “How’s this? Ain’t picking on a little kid now,” Trevor taunted.

“Come on. Just leave me alone,” she said before Austin gave her a shove.

Tommy caught her. “You hear that boys? The princess wants us to stop.”

“Leave her alone!” a little voice demanded. They stopped long enough to glance at Roland. He stood beside them, a determined look on his face and his little hands balled into fists.

The boys laughed. “Look at that, princess. You have your own little knight. Too bad he’s barely out of diapers,” Trevor teased.

“Roland, run!” Sophie called out.

Austin snickered as Trevor mimicked her. “Yes, Roland. Run and hide like a baby.”

Roland charged at the boys, despite being half their size. Tommy moved Sophie aside to try and block the boy but she kicked the inside of his leg. He left Roland alone as he turned on her. “You shouldn’t have done that, Princess,” Tommy roared. He shoved her hard into Trevor’s arms.

Laughing, Trevor caught her and shook her. She flew from his grip and hit the bookcase hard. Pain shot through her left side as she crumpled to the floor, crying out.

“Sophie!” Roland knelt next to her. “Are you hurt?”

She nodded, letting out a whimper as Ms. Belle turned the corner. Her eyes widened as she took in Sophie before she turned to the four stunned boys, angry. “What happened here?”

Roland pointed at them. “They hurt Sophie. They pushed her around.”

“It was an accident,” Trevor replied, dazed. “I swear.”

Ms. Belle took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. She pointed to an empty table. “You four sit there and don’t move while I call the authorities.”

For the first time, Sophie saw Trevor and his friends be genuinely afraid. Their faces went white and they shuffled off to sit at the table.
“Sophie, I’ll be right back, okay?” Ms. Belle crouched down, looking concerned.

She nodded as tears clouded her vision. Roland pressed himself closer to her as he patted her hair. It was probably mimicking something his father did when he was upset. Sophie was both touched and envious that Roland had those moments with Robin. With their father.

Pain though overtook all her other feelings and she started crying as Roland continued to pat her. “It’s okay, Sophie,” he said.


“I’m sure she’s coming. Do you want Mr. Bananas until she does? He always makes me feel better.”

Sophie shook her head as she sniffed. “I don’t think Mr. Bananas will help me. Only my mom.”

Roland nodded before picking up a book. He opened it and smiled at her. “Then I’ll read to you until your mommy comes. How’s that?”

“I guess it’ll work,” Sophie said as Ms. Belle returned with an ice pack. She placed it on Sophie’s sore wrist and told the girl to hold it there. It started to numb the pain but she still felt horrible. She glanced up at Ms. Belle. “Is my mom coming?”

“Soon,” Ms. Belle replied. “Your Aunt Emma is going to get her and the ambulance is on its way.”

Roland continued reading, moving on to another book before she heard the familiar click-clack of her mother’s heels. The mayor rounded a corner, brown eyes wide with fear and panic. She raced toward her daughter, kneeling down in her form-fitting black dress to cup her daughter’s cheek. “Sophie, where does it hurt?”

“My wrist. Make it go away, Mommy.” She leaned against her mother’s chest as she resumed sobbing.

Her mother ran her fingers though her hair as she looked up to the sheriff. “Emma, can I take her to the hospital now?”

“The ambulance is here,” Emma said. “Let the EMTs look her over.”

“What took them so long? They should’ve been here before us,” Regina snapped as the two men in blue uniforms rounded the corner, carrying their medical supplies.

One EMT knelt in front of Sophie, nonplussed. “Apologies, Madam Mayor. We were at another incident and got here as soon as we could.”

Ms. Belle had moved Roland away from Sophie’s side so the EMTs could examine her wrist and he pulled away from the librarian, running toward his father with arms outstretched. “Papa!”

“My boy,” Robin said as he settled Roland on his hip. He knelt next to Sophie, looking as panicked and worried as her mother. Robin kissed her forehead. “My girl.”

Her heart soared at the endearment until piercing pain shot through her arm again, causing her to cry out in pain. Robin wrapped his arm around her shoulders as Regina rounded on the EMT. “You’re hurting her, you fool!” she snapped.
“I have to figure out the extent of her injuries,” he explained, remaining calm in the face of her mother’s wrath. “We’ll transport her to the hospital for a full examination, but I think it’s just sprained not broken.”

“You hear that, Soph? It’s not too bad,” Robin said, rubbing her back.

She sniffed. “It still hurts, though.”

“I know, sweetheart.” He kissed her head again. “But the doctors will make you feel better.”

“And then you’ll get a lollipop!” Roland added, getting a small smile from her.

The EMTs loaded her onto a gurney as Robin picked up Roland, setting him on his hip. She watched as he approached her mother. “I’ll drop this one with Will and meet you at the hospital, okay?”

Regina nodded. “I’ll let the hospital staff know you’re coming.”

“Thank you.” He came back over to Sophie. “I’ll be there as soon as possible. I love you.”

She almost cried from joy rather than pain. “I love you too.”

Roland looked between Sophie and his father, confused. But he leaned toward her, forcing Robin to move him closer to the girl. Roland kissed her cheek. “Feel better, Sophie.”

“I’m starting to,” she told him. “Thank you.”

Robin stepped aside as they loaded her into the ambulance, helping her mother in after her. Regina took Sophie’s uninjured hand but the girl kept her eyes on her father until the ambulance door was shut. As they sped off toward the hospital, she turned to look at her mother again. “He said he loved me,” she said.

“Yes he did. And he does,” Regina said. She rubbed her daughter’s hand. “I know that wasn’t the reunion you expected.”

“No, but it was good. Will he be around more now?”

“I think he will. He does want a relationship with you, Sophie. And I’m not going to stop him.”

“Thank you, Mommy.” Sophie’s wrist began to thaw without the icepack and the throbbing began again. She let out a few whimpers and Regina hugged her, trying to soothe her.

“We’re almost there,” the EMT said. “And they’ll fix you right up.”

Her mother thanked him as she stroked her hair. It was a familiar comforting motioning Sophie had experienced her entire life. Sophie snuggled closer to her mother, listening to the steady beating of her heart.

Yes, she had her father now. But she had had her mother her whole life. Nothing was going to change that or the fact she was always going to need her. “I love you, Mommy.”

“I love you too,” Regina responded. “Always and forever.”

Emma had given him directions to the hospital before he left the library. So after leaving a confused Roland with Will, Robin jumped back into his car and sped off there. He would have to
figure out how to explain to a five-years-old that he now had an older sister but he’d worry about that later. Right now, his daughter needed him.

His daughter. That was going to take some getting used to but he would adjust quickly, he knew. He was going to be part of Sophie’s life from this day forward and not abandon her again, despite it being unintentional.

As he stopped at a red light, he closed his eyes for a moment. There was a part of him that hated Regina’s mother. He knew she was dead, which was a good thing. Roland and Sophie didn’t need him going to prison for murder, no matter how justified it was. Cora Mills cost him ten years with his daughter because she tried to control her daughter’s life.

Robin pulled into the parking lot and found a spot. He resisted the urge to run to Sophie’s side, not wanting to end up lying injured next to her. And Regina was with her, so she was in good hands.

The doors slid open and he didn’t stop until he reached the front desk. “I’m looking for Sophie Mills,” he said.

“Name?” the nurse asked.

“Robin Locksley.”

She nodded, standing. “Follow me and I’ll take you to her cubicle.”

They walked past a few empty areas until they reached one in the back. Regina sat next to Sophie, stroking her hair as the girl slept on. She glanced up as Robin approached, giving him a sad smile. “Thank you for coming.”

“Of course,” he said, sitting on Sophie’s other side. “Now that I know, I intend to be a father to her.”

Regina nodded. “I’m not going to stop you. I want you to be close.”

“So you’d be okay if I moved to Storybrooke?”

“Of course. But you’d upend your life because you discovered you have a daughter? What about Roland?”

“I would do anything for my children,” he replied. “But in all honesty, this would be me and Roland finally settling down.”

“Really?” Regina asked.

He nodded. “It’s been easy to go from camp location to camp location but now he needs roots and to go to school. Storybrooke seemed like the perfect place even before…”

Trailing off, Robin glanced down at his sleeping daughter. He placed a hand on her head, smiling. “You’ve done a great job with her.”

“Thank you,” she replied. “And once again, I’m sorry.”

He sighed. “I’m sorry too.”

“For what? I’m the one who assumed you were a deadbeat dad, who assumed the worst despite only ever knowing you to be kind and honorable.”

“For a long time, I didn’t have very kind and honorable thoughts about you,” he confessed. “And
I was willing to believe you moved on despite everything that told me you’d be faithful.”

Regina gave him a sad smile. “Well, we’re certainly a pair.”

“Yes, we are,” he agreed. “And Sophie got caught in the middle.”

They fell into silence and Robin watched his daughter sleep. Her dark eyelashes, tanned skin and dark hair all had been inherited from Regina. She hardly showed any resemblance to him like this, just like Roland when he was asleep. But like her brother, she had Robin’s smile and dimples. Not like he was going to see them soon since she was in so much pain.

“Where is Whale? How long can X-Rays take?” Regina glanced at the hallway.

Robin frowned. “How long ago did they take them?”

“Umm…” She checked her watch. “About a half hour ago.”

“Then they should be ready. I’m sure the doctor’s on the way.”

Regina nodded but continued to tap her foot. He fought the urge to smile, recalling how he used to tease her for being too impatient. It was comforting to know somethings never changed.

Sophie started to whimper and her face scrunched up in pain. Robin turned his attention back to her. Leaning close, he ran a hand through her hair. “Hey there, sweet girl. It’s going to be all right.”

“Daddy?” She opened her eyes though they were still unfocused from sleep, medicine and pain.

He smiled. “I’m right here. Sorry it took so long.”

“S’okay,” she murmured. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Robin kissed her forehead as footsteps grew louder, signaling someone was approaching. He sat up as Regina stood. “Victor Whale, that better be you,” she called out.

“It is,” said the doctor, judging by his lab coat. He gave a Regina a stern look. “I hope you wouldn’t have taken it out on some poor nurse if it hadn’t.”

“I wouldn’t let her,” Robin said. “Your nursing staff would’ve been safe.”

As Regina scowled at him, Dr. Whale frowned. “I wasn’t aware he was back in the picture.”

Robin frowned, not pleased with being talked about as if he wasn’t in the room. It always was a pet peeve of his. “I’m right here and I’m now a part of her life.”

“This has been a very recent development. Not that it’s something that needs to be splashed across the front page of The Mirror.” Regina frowned. “Now, can we focus on our daughter?”

Whale nodded, moving past Regina to take Sophie’s injured wrist. Robin held her other hand. “Squeeze if you need to,” he told her.
She nodded and squeezed his hand right after as Whale probed her wrist. The doctor gave her a sympathetic look. “Did that hurt?”

“Yes,” she whimpered, squeezing Robin’s hand.

Regina walked over to stand next to him, rubbing Sophie’s leg as she leaned closer to their daughter. He ignored how close that brought her to him and the vanilla scent wafting up from her, still familiar after ten years apart.

Another squeeze brought his attention back to the other Mills girl in his life. He kissed Sophie’s hand. “You’re being really brave, my sweet girl.”

“I don’t feel brave,” she said. “I feel pain and I’m tired. Can I go home?”

Dr. Whale put her arm back down. “I’m going to do my best, Sophie. You rest while I talk to your parents.”

Robin and Regina followed the doctor a few steps away. She hugged herself as she glanced back at Sophie. “What’s the diagnosis?”

“The X-Rays don’t show a break. I want to do an MRI to confirm, but I think it’s a sprain,” Whale said.

Regina nodded. “Does she need to stay overnight?”

“I’m going to recommend she not. Depends if I can get her into the MRI soon. But I do feel it’s best if Sophie goes home at least in a soft cast until the results come back,” Whale replied.

“Thank you,” Robin said. “Can we go back to our daughter?”

Dr. Whale nodded. “I’m going to check with radiology now. I’ll let you know if we can get Sophie in today.”

Robin nodded, placing his hand on the small of Regina’s back out of habit. He guided her into the cubicle and back to Sophie’s side.

Regina watched Robin as he talked to their daughter in a reassuring voice and petted her hair. Sophie basked in the attention, moving closer to her father as she laid on the cot. It was heartwarming and everything Regina had imagined when she had allowed herself to hope Robin would still come back to them.

Of course, she never imagined it involving the hospital or Sophie in so much pain.

Sophie’s head rolled over to face her. “Mommy?”

“Yes, baby?” Regina’s heart constricted as she took her daughter’s hand.

“It hurts again. Really, really bad.” Tears ran down her cheeks.

Regina wiped her daughter’s face. “The medicine’s probably wearing off.”

“I’ll go get a nurse. See if we can get Sophie another dose,” Robin replied, standing.

Regina followed him with her eyes as he left until Sophie tugged her hand. “Daddy’s great,” she said.
“Yes, he is,” Regina replied with a smile.

“Mommy, what’s going to happen to Trevor and his friends?” Sophie asked, frowning.

Regina’s smile dropped into a frown as well. She hadn’t even thought about the boys who put her daughter here. Shrugging, she tuck some hair behind Sophie’s ear. “I don’t know. Aunt Emma will handle that for now as will the courts. But I will make sure they are punished. They will learn that their actions have consequence.”

“Who are we talking about?” Robin asked as he returned with a nurse.

As the woman gave Sophie another dosage, Robin and Regina moved away a bit. “We were talking about the boys who…” Regina trailed off.

He nodded, rubbing his chin. “I want to put them into these other cubicles,” he admitted.

“That won’t help Sophie.”

“I know but it would feel so good.”

Regina nodded. “I wouldn’t mind taking a swing at those punks but at least I can make sure they will regret this for a long, long time.”

“If they get community service, I know the prefect place,” Robin said.

The nurse approached them. “This dosage should last her six hours. Dr. Whale will be with you shortly.”

Regina returned to her daughter’s bedside, Robin on her heels. She took a blanket and covered Sophie. “Feeling better?”

“No,” Sophie said, sniffing. “It still hurts.”

“You have to give it some time to kick in,” Robin told her.

Whale entered the room. “Good news. We can get Sophie into the MRI now. No braces, right?”

Regina nodded. “I just need to take of her locket.”

She leaned over and unclasped the gold heart her daughter always wore. Regina placed it in a little box she always kept in her purse before nodding to Whale. “She’s ready.”

“Oh,” Whale said. “The tech and I will take her up and the nurse will escort the two of you to the waiting area.”

Sophie grabbed both their hands. “Mommy? Daddy?”

“It’ll be okay, baby girl. We’ll see you in a bit.” Robin kissed her forehead.

Regina did the same as she smoothed her daughter’s hair down. “It’s almost over, darling.”

Sophie was wheeled out as Regina took several deep calming breaths. Robin’s hand settled on her back again. “She’ll be fine,” he told her.

“She’s so scared.” Regina’s voice cracked as she tried not to cry herself. “I wish I could take her pain away.”
“I know. I do too.” Robin rubbed her back as the nurse took them upstairs.

They sat on identical plastic chairs, side by side. Robin leaned closer. “You want coffee?”

“No. I don’t think I can keep anything down until she’s back home.”

“Do you think you’ll be okay if I go to get a cup?” he asked.

She nodded. “I’ll be fine. Probably should update the others. And you should check in with Roland.”

“Yeah.” He checked his watch with a frown. “Will should’ve fed him by now.”

Robin walked away and she closed her eyes. All she wanted was to get her daughter home, fed and safely tucked into her bed before she let the day melt away in a long bath. Between reuniting with Robin and spending the afternoon in the hospital, she had a lot of stress to wash away before bed.

She sighed, thinking of Robin. He had handled everything better than she expected. Regina had braced herself for a lot more anger and a lot of blame. When he shared some of it, though, she realized he was still the same man in many ways.

It was comforting to see he hadn’t changed so drastically. He was still open-minded and forgiving. And still a very tactile person, not just with Sophie but with her as well. She remembered how he’d always be touching her, from a simple hand hold to caresses to a lot more when they were alone in this room. And the hot tub…

She shook her head, knowing that now was not the time to get lost in those memories. Especially if she wanted to rebuild a friendship with Robin. He was closed off to her in a way she had never experienced. The fact he had said so little of Roland or the boy’s mother spoke volumes of how much they needed to repair to at least be friends again. That would be enough for her, she believed. It had to be.

“Here, I brought you coffee anyway.” Robin handed her a Styrofoam cup. “Hope you still like it the same way.”

She took a sip and nodded. “Close enough. I’ve switched to skim milk but a dash of regular milk won’t hurt.”

“Some things never change.”

Regina smiled. “I was just thinking the same thing.”

He let out a soft chuckle but it turned into a groan as he sat down, rubbing his knees.

“Unfortunately, some things have changed.”

“When did we get so old?” Regina asked.

“We’re thirty-three,” he shot back before sighing. “And parents.”

She nodded. “How’s Roland?”

“He’s good. Very confused but enjoying time with his Uncle Will. Especially as he’s given him pizza and probably an unholy amount of sugar.”
Regina tilted her head, hoping she wasn’t pushing her luck as she pressed on. “You don’t give him pizza often?”

“Someone I cared about once taught me the importance of vegetables,” he said with a smile. “I’ve passed it onto my son.”

“So you finally learned to cook?”

He laughed. “Well, I couldn’t live on takeaway forever. Especially once Roland came along.”

“I’m so proud of you,” she said with a smile.

“And I’m proud of you. You really have done a great job with Sophie.”

Regina blushed. “Thank you. But I had a lot of help. Mal, Emma, Graham and my mother all have played a role in Sophie’s upbringing.”

“Your mother?” His jaw tightened.

She sighed. And it had been going so well. “Yes, my mother. I’m not going to make excuses for what she did to us. It was awful…”

“Unforgiveable,” Robin muttered.

“I guess that too. But she changed. She was a great grandmother to Sophie.”

“But she never decided to tell you that she kept us apart,” Robin said. “She never gave me a chance.”

Regina leaned back, blowing out. “I’m upset too. But Sophie loves her grandmother.”

He closed his eyes, nodding. “She won’t hear a cross word from me. But I’m not going to listen to praise of the woman either.”

“Mayor Mills?” A nurse emerged, ending their conversation. “Sophie is done and is asking for you.”

Regina handed Robin her cooling coffee as she hurried into the room. Whale was wrapping her daughter’s wrist in a soft cast. “Leave this on and try not to jostle it, okay?” he told her.

Sophie nodded. “Can I go home?”

“Yes, you can. Mom just has to fill out some forms.” Whale turned to Regina. “And you’ll need to bring her back tomorrow.”

Regina nodded, pulling Sophie close to her. “Thank you, Victor.”

Sophie glanced up at her. “Can Daddy come tomorrow?”

“You can ask him,” Regina said, feeling the answer was going to be yes. “Come on, let’s go.”

Robin stood as Regina led Sophie from the room. Her wrist was wrapped up but she remained focused on him, surprised. “You stayed?”

“Of course I did,” he replied, confused. “Why wouldn’t I?”
“What about Roland?”

“He’s fine. It’s you I’m focused on.” Robin wrapped his arms around her trying not to jostle her wrist.

Sophie leaned into him and wrapped her good arm around him. He held her close at last, trying to make up for ten years of hugs.

“I have to complete her discharge paperwork. You two wait here,” Regina said, smiling at father and daughter before heading down the hall.

Robin led Sophie back to the chairs and let her sit on his lap. He rubbed her back as he explained, “I’m staying around to be a proper dad to you. If you’d like it.”

“I’d love it,” she replied. “And will I get to be Roland’s big sister?”

“You are. And once I tell him, I’m sure he’ll be thrilled to be your little brother.”

She nodded before resting her head against his shoulder. He continued to rub her back as he rocked her gently. Closing his eyes, he tried to imagine rocking her as a baby. Carrying her around like he did Roland, falling asleep on the couch with her curled up on his chest…Robin fought the anger at Cora Mills rising back up in him. He could rage at the woman who stole all of that from him later.

Instead, he focused on Sophie and kissed the top of her head again. He had been amazed at how overwhelming and instantaneous his love for Roland had been the moment the labor and delivery nurse had put him in his arms. The same feeling washed over him now with Sophie. And like he did when he first held Roland, he promised himself he would do everything he could to keep her happy and safe.

Regina returned with a wheelchair and gave him a soft smile as she took in the scene. “She’s cleared to go, as long as she leaves in this.”


She nodded as she lifted her head from his shoulder, letting him help her into the wheelchair. He pulled out his keys as he met Regina’s eyes. “I’ll go pull my car around so I can drive you two home.”

“Thank you,” Regina said, giving him a small smile.

He squeezed Sophie’s shoulder before heading back to the parking lot. Regina and their daughter preoccupied his thoughts as he retraced his steps. They were both beautiful, Regina even more so than when he last saw her. Motherhood had agreed with her and she just seemed to glow.

Robin had thought about her often since driving away from Storybrooke almost eleven years ago—more often than he wanted to admit. His lingering feelings for Regina had been a sticking point in his relationship with Marian. There were days, like this, when he felt guilty for not loving her the way she deserved. For not loving her the way he had loved Regina.

How he still loved her.

There was no denying it. Not after spending the past few hours with her. He had expected his meeting with her to end his lingering feeling, expected a fight over Sophie and to hear a litany of excuses over why she had kept his daughter from him. Instead, he had found a woman who had
regrets and who had been just as deceived as him. He had to face his own role in destroying their relationship and keeping him from having a role in Sophie’s life. They still had a lot to discuss about how to proceed as parents going forward, but he knew they would be able to work it out.

His own relationship with Regina needed work too. Robin knew they weren’t going to pick up where they left off and doubted she still carried the same torch he did. Even though a boyfriend hadn’t come to check on her and Sophie, he knew she had to have found someone else. Someone who deserved her. All he could do now was hope that they could all be friends for Sophie’s sake.

Robin pulled his car up to the emergency room exit, where Regina and Sophie were waiting. He got out to help them, moving Roland’s booster seat to his trunk to give them more space. Regina helped Sophie get in before climbing in next to her. Sophie curled up on her mother’s lap as best as the seat belt allowed her.

Turning out of the parking lot, Robin followed the directions Regina gave him. He glanced at her and Sophie using the rearview mirror every so often. Sophie had her eyes closed and was no doubt asleep, head resting on her mother’s lap. Regina carded her fingers through Sophie’s hair, humming softly to her.

He recalled driving Marian and baby Roland home from the hospital and at a red light, imagined what it would’ve been like to drive Regina and baby Sophie home. Robin saw Regina as she had been that summer—sun-kissed skin, long wavy hair, and wearing a brightly colored sundress that made her stand out—seated next to a baby swaddled in all pink. In his mind’s eye, he saw her holding the baby in the car seat as she smiled and hummed to her.

“Robin?” Regina’s voice broke his reverie and she pointed out the window. “Light’s green.”

Sheepish, he drove off as he ignored the pain in his heart over the memories he’d never make with Sophie. But he knew he had to focus on the new memories he could make with her.

Chapter End Notes

Here is the next chapter! Once again, thanks to all who have supported this from when I first published it as what was supposed to be a one-shot until it took on a life of its own.

So, stay tuned as the Locksleys and the Mills figure out their new family arrangement. And will Robin and Regina admit to their feelings? Find out!

--Mac
Chapter 4: The Locksley-Mills Clan

Sophie lounged on the couch, her blanket tucked around her. A pillow propped her up and her injured wrist rested on a second one. She was having a Disney movie marathon, her tradition whenever she wasn’t feeling well. When she was well into Robin Hood, the doorbell rang. Lifting her head, she called out: “Mom?”

Regina emerged from the back of the house, a basket filled with clean laundry on her hip. She had taken off despite the Summer Festival happening that weekend, caring for Sophie and her injury. No matter how busy she got as mayor, Regina was always a mother first and would put everything on hold for Sophie.

Sophie liked these days and not just because she had her mother to herself. It was because she got to see her mother as a normal mother. Regina wore jeans and a red t-shirt while doing chores. Today, it was doing laundry and so she smelled like fabric softener.

Putting down the basket, Regina asked: “What’s wrong?”

Before Sophie could answer, the doorbell rang again. She watched her mother tighten her ponytail before going to answer the door.

“Hello, Ms. Regina,” she heard Roland say. “Can I see Sophie?”

His request was followed by her mother’s laugh. “You must be Roland. Of course you may. She’s in the living room.”

After a few low mutterings between her parents, Robin and Roland came into the living room. Roland let go of their father’s hand and ran toward Sophie. “Are you feeling better?”

“Yes, I am,” she said, pausing her movie.

Roland held up a bag. “I got you a present to help you feel better and because Papa says he’s your Papa too so you’re my sister.”

“I am,” she said, feeling Robin’s hand on her hair. “I’ve never been a big sister before. I hope I don’t get it wrong.”

“That’s okay. I’ve never been a little brother before. But I’m gonna be the best brother ever! I’ll even share my toys.”

Robin chuckled as he crouched down next to his children. “Roland, are you going to give Sophie her present?”

“Oh, yeah!” Roland handed her the bag and watched as she pulled a book out. He bounced up and down, excited. “Ms. Belle said you’d love it.”

“I do,” Sophie said. “I’ve wanted to read it for a long time now.”

He beamed as Robin handed her a bag as well. “I know I still owe you a fair amount of birthday
and Christmas gifts…I’d offer you a pony, but your mother probably put you on a horse before you could walk.”

“Well, not that early,” Sophie said. “But I do have a horse. Grandmother gave her to me.”

His jaw tensed up, which did not go unnoticed by her, but it only lasted a few moments. He smiled and motioned to the bag. “Open it.”

Sophie reached into a bag and pulled out a crème colored stuffed horse. “It looks like Applesauce. He’s my horse,” she said before throwing her arms around him. “Thank you, Daddy.”

He held her close, kissing her cheek. “I love hearing that,” he whispered.

“I love saying it,” she whispered back. She let go of him, though she wanted to hold onto him forever, and settled back down on the couch.

Roland leaned closer. “Can I sit with you?”

Sophie nodded, scooting over so Roland could sit with her. He climbed onto the couch and curled next to her, resting his head on her shoulder. “I like having a sister.”

“I like having a brother,” she replied, resting her head on his.

Robin kissed both of them, smiling. “I’m going to talk with your mother, Sophie. If you two need anything, give a shout, okay?”

She nodded as did Roland. He gave them kisses again, lingering longer on Sophie’s. She relished the contact with her father and closed her eyes to cherish the moment. When he stepped away, she pushed down the disappointment flooding her.

Instead, she put on a smile and turned to Roland. “Do you like Robin Hood?”

“It’s my favorite movie,” he told her, eyes lighting up.

She laughed, pressing play to resume the movie. Picking up her bucket of snacks, she held it out to Roland. “Pretzel?”

Robin found Regina pouring lemonade for her guests. He leaned against her refrigerator, smiling as he crossed his arms. “Need any help?”

“No, I’m fine.” She handed him a glass. “Why aren’t you spoiling our daughter?”

He chuckled. “I’m letting Sophie and Roland bond as brother and sister.”

“He’s okay with it?” Regina asked. “He’s not upset?”

“No. He’s really excited to have a sister. I think it’s because he already idolizes her.”

“He seems to be a sweet kid,” Regina said.

Robin nodded. “Thank you. You’ll have to be careful around him. He’s quite the charmer.”

“Wonder where he got that from?” she teased him.

This felt both strange and familiar. Both them together, smiling and teach each other. Robin
pushed it down, not wanting to focus on it yet.

Regina picked up her tray. “I’ll take this to the kids. You have a seat and I’ll be right back.”

He pulled out one of her kitchen chairs, taking in the modern kitchen done in blacks and whites. The house was a nice-sized colonial and had been her mother’s, if he remembered the address correctly. Cora must’ve signed over the house to Regina at some point—probably to provide a future for her and Sophie.

*But never did she think to include me on that future. Or give Regina and me a chance to figure out if we did have a future.* He balled his hands into fists, taking several deep breaths to calm down before Regina returned.

“Robin? Is something wrong?” He opened his eyes to see her settling into the chair next to him. She toyed with the condensation running down her glass.

He forced a smile and shook his head. “I’m fine. How are the kids?”

“They’re good. Both absorbed in the adventures of Robin Hood.” Regina paused before asking: “Thinking about my mother again?”

“Is it that obvious?” he asked with a sigh.

She nodded. “You realized I still live in her house.”

“I’m sure it’s your house now.”

“It is,” she confirmed. “Mother signed it over to me for my thirtieth birthday. She continued to live here to help with Sophie, of course.”

He nodded, cursing the woman for spending the time with his daughter she had stolen from him. But he took a calming breath. “So, what do we do now?”

“I spoke with Mal and she’s going to put me in touch with a family lawyer,” Regina replied.

“Do I need one?” Robin asked. Regina seemed open to working things out but may she had changed her mind overnight.

She shrugged. “If you want. I just need some advice…I never put your name on her birth certificate.”

“We need to establish my paternity,” Robin said, realizing what she meant. He felt a pang of guilt for assuming the worst, for assuming she wasn’t trying to help him. “I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“Good. The lawyer Mal recommended is out on vacation but I’ll let you know when she returns,” Regina said.

Robin nodded before pulling out his phone. “I think I should probably get as much of Sophie’s information as I can. Let’s start with her birth.”

“Her birthday is May 16th and she was born at four nineteen in the morning after fifteen hours of labor. Would you like me to recount everyone one of them?”

He held up his hand. “I’ve experienced a woman in labor. I think I’m good. Let’s move on to her middle name. Does she have one? Is it Regina? Because Sophie Regina has a nice ring to it.”

“Emma said the same but I didn’t give Sophie my name as her middle one.”
“Does she have one?” At Regina’s nod, he pressed on: “Then what is it?”

Regina hesitated. “You’re not going to like it.”

“Why wouldn’t I…?” His face fell. “You didn’t.”

“I did. Sophie Cora Mills.”

Robin let out a breath, trying to release his anger with it. “Of course you did.”

“Robin, I explained…”

“It’s okay, Regina. You had every right to name her whatever you wanted.”

Regina nodded before pulling out her phone. “We, uh, never exchanged numbers. We probably should.”

The spent the next half hour exchanging important numbers, including all of Sophie’s doctors. Regina gave him a rundown of their daughter’s medical history, which was relatively short and included only an allergy to penicillin. “Makes finding the right antibiotic hard, but Whale knows which ones now,” Regina explained.

“Roland’s allergic to peanuts,” Robin offered. “You should know since we’ll all be spending time together.”

Regina’s eyes widened and he frowned. “Did you think I was going to avoid you the rest of Sophie’s childhood? The rest of her life?”

“Well, no,” she said, but the way she avoided his eyes told him otherwise. “I just didn’t think you’d also be bringing Roland around, that you’d be okay with him being around me. That Sophie would spend most of her time with you and him at your place.”

Robin’s frown deepened. “I have no reason not to trust you with him, Regina.”

“Even after keeping Sophie from you for ten years?”

“That wasn’t your fault. Not completely,” he said. “And you need to stop apologizing. I forgive you. Your mother…well, you know that. And I hope that you can forgive me for the role I played in all of this.”

She took a deep breath. “I do forgive you. But I don’t think I’ll be getting over the guilt anytime soon.”

“Neither will I. But let’s not focus on that. Instead, let’s focus on our beautiful girl.” His fingers twitched closer to hers on the table and he almost had her hand in his when…

“Ms. Regina?” Roland appeared in the doorway, holding two empty glasses.

Regina stood, approaching Roland with a smile. She leaned down to look him in the eyes. “What do you need, Roland?”

“Sophie and I would like more lemonade, please,” he replied.

“Of course.” Regina took the cups and poured more lemonade for their children.

Robin pulled his son close. “You having fun with your sister?”
“Uh huh!” Roland nodded his head. “I wish she wasn’t hurt so we could play though.”

“I know. But there will be plenty of time for that.” Robin kissed his son’s brow.

Regina held out the two full cups. “Can you handle these or do you need help?”

“I can carry them,” Roland said, though Robin could see uncertainty in his eyes.

He leaned forward. “Are you sure? I can help you.”

Roland jutted his chin out, a determined look in his brown eyes. “I got it.”

“Okay, but you let me know if you need help.” Regina handed him the cups. “Be careful, okay?”

“I will.” He beamed at her. “Thank you, Ms. Regina.

The adults watched as he took small and careful steps out of the kitchen and back to the living room. Regina still had a soft smile on her face. “He’s a sweet, polite boy.”

“Thank you. I’m doing my best,” Robin replied.

Regina took her seat again. “I understand. It’s not easy being a single parent.”

“Well, you don’t have to be a single parent to Sophie anymore.”

She gave him a look. “Co-parenting doesn’t mean I’m still not a single parent. We’re not getting married.”

“Of course.” A pang hurt his heart but he kept his mood light, leaning back in his seat with a grin. “So, Madame Mayor, I am a new resident in town. Tell me what I need to know.”

“Well, what exactly do you need to know?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Let’s start with education. I do have a kindergartener to enroll.”

“True,” Regina replied. “Well, your options are Storybrooke Academy, Storybrooke Academy or Storybrooke Academy.”

“Hmm…Tell me more about this Storybrooke Academy.”

“Excellent choice,” Regina replied before laughing. “It’s a great school—a private school education at a public school price.”

Robin nodded “Sounds nice. Sophie goes there?”

“Of course. I went there and now she does. Besides, how would it look if the mayor sent her daughter to a school outside of town?”

“Good point,” he chuckled.

Regina stood, checking her watch. “I need to go help Sophie get ready for her appointment. Do you need to drop Roland off anywhere?”

“No, he wants to come,” Robin said. “I told him it was boring but he doesn’t want to leave Sophie’s side.”

“He’s sweet,” she said. “Alright, I’ll go get both kids ready.”
She left the kitchen and he rested his head in his hands. This could’ve been his life—children playing together while Regina and he had some quality time together. Even if it was just to have a completely domestic conversation, like about schools or the kids’ schedule. As long as they were together...

Regina appeared in the doorway, smiling. “Come with me. Bring your phone.”

He did as she said, following her into the living room. She pressed a finger to her lips, motioning to the couch and the heart melting sight on it.

Sophie and Roland were curled together under the blanket, asleep. Their heads were facing each other, dark hairs spread out over the pillow they shared. It struck him how much they looked alike despite the fact they bore very little resemblance to him, their shared parent.

He took a picture of them—his first of both his children. Beside him, Regina sighed. “I hate to wake them.”

“I know,” he replied. “But Sophie does have an appointment.”

She nodded, approaching their daughter and giving her a gentle shake. After a few seconds, Sophie blinked her eyes open. “What’s wrong?”

“Time to see Dr. Whale and get the results of your MRI.”

Sophie nodded, sitting up. Her eyes met Robin’s and he smiled. “Hey there, sweet girl.”

“Hi, Daddy,” she mumbled. “Are you leaving?”

He shook his head. “I’m going to your appointment, just like you asked. So why don’t you get dressed and we can leave?”

She nodded, standing. After a moment’s pause, she threw her arms around him. He held her close, closing his eyes as another wave of love washed over him.

“Okay, Sophie,” Regina said, softly. “I’ll help you get dressed.”

Sophie followed her mother upstairs as Robin sat next to Roland. He shook his son. “Time to wake up.”

Roland’s eyes opened and he frowned. “Where’s Sophie?”

“She’s getting dressed. And we need to get your shoes on. Where did you leave them?” Robin searched around the couch.

Roland pointed to the door. “I left them by there.”

“Right,” Robin groaned, standing up. “Wait here.”

By the time he got Roland’s shoes on, Sophie and Regina were ready. He took out his keys, ushering the children to his car as she grabbed her purse. Once again, he was struck by the domesticity of the situation…and how this could’ve been his.

Damn you, Cora Mills. And damn myself for letting you play me.
Regina had agreed to let Robin drive since he had the booster seat for Roland. She watched the boy in the rearview mirror, his little legs swinging back and forth as he watched Storybrooke go by. Robin was raising a polite and kind child and she felt pulled toward Roland already. It was a dangerous feeling because while she didn’t know why his mother wasn’t around anymore, she knew she would never fill that role for him.

“Ms. Regina?” Roland asked. “You’re in charge of the town, right?”

She smiled. “Yes, Roland, I guess as mayor I’m in charge of Storybrooke.”

“So does that make you a queen?”

“Well, not really.” She glanced back at him. “Being mayor is very different from being a queen.”

“Oh.” Roland looked disappointed. “So Sophie isn’t really a princess?”

Regina frowned. “Why do you ask that?”

“Because the boys called her princess,” he explained.

Sophie sighed, looking away from the window. “They were making fun of me, Roland, because Mom’s the mayor.”

Anger flooded Regina at the thought of Sophie being bullied and it was followed by guilt that it was because of her. “I’m sorry, sweetie,” she told Sophie.

“It’s not your fault,” Robin told her. “It’s on those boys and their parents. No one should be teased and made to feel bad. Especially about being a princess. Princesses are amazing.”

Regina smiled at Robin’s speech. It was just like him. “Every girl is a princess,” she said, knowing Sophie would recognize the reference. And judging by her smile, she got it.

“Sophie’s Wonder Woman,” Robin said, smiling at his daughter while stopped at a red light.

“She’s a princess,” Sophie and Regina said at the same time. While Sophie loved all types of books, comics were their special thing.

Roland frowned. “I wanna know more about Wonder Woman.”

“Oh, I’m sure Ms. Regina will be happy to tell you all about her,” Robin said, winking at her.

She rolled her eyes as they parked. Robin hopped out to help Sophie while she got Roland out of his booster seat. He looked at her with wide brown eyes. “Will you tell me about Wonder Woman, Ms. Regina? Please?”

“Of course, Roland.” She took his hand, letting Robin and Sophie spend time together. She swung Roland’s arm, getting a laugh from the boy. “What do you want to know?”

He bounced as they walked into the hospital. “Everything!”

“Everything? That might take forever!” She wasn’t watching where she was going, focused on the little boy, and collided with someone else. Her head snapped up. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay, Mayor Mills. I’m unharmed.” Dr. Archie Hopper smiled at her, umbrella resting against his leg. He glanced down and smiled at Roland. “And who is your new friend?”

Regina felt Roland hide behind her legs as she introduced him. “He’s Sophie’s half-brother,” she
explained.

Archie tilted his head. “So the man I saw Sophie with a few seconds ago…?”

“Is her father,” Regina confirmed. “He just came back into our lives.”

“And how do you feel about that?” He slipped easily into therapist mode and Regina bit back a laugh.

She took a deep breath. “I feel a lot of things about it,” she confessed.

“Of course,” he said. “Why don’t you make an appointment and we can talk? Sophie too.”

“Thank you,” Regina said softly. “Excuse me.”

Archie stepped aside, bowing his head to her. “Have a good day, Regina. You too, Roland.”

The two entered the waiting room, finding Robin and Sophie easily. Roland let go of her hand to rush over to his father and sister. He climbed into Robin’s lap as Sophie showed him her locket.

Regina hung back, knowing from Robin’s look that he recognized it. He had saved all summer to buy it for her before they parted for what they had thought was a brief separation. She had worn it until she realized he wasn’t coming for her. Then it had gone into her jewelry box until Sophie discovered it. She claimed it for her own and Regina was glad to give her something of her father’s—even if she didn’t know it was his.

He gave her a look as she sat down next to Sophie. It did not go unnoticed by their daughter, who frowned. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Robin was quick to answer.

Regina sighed. “It’s the locket. I wasn’t truthful when I told you I didn’t know where I got it.”

Sophie looked over at Robin, figuring it out. “You gave it to her.”

“I did.” He kissed her head. “But I’m glad she gave it to you.”

“Me too.” She leaned her head against him as Roland rested his head on Robin’s other shoulder.

Regina had heard other woman talk about thing that had “made their ovaries ache” but thought they were being dramatic—especially Emma whenever she talked about Storybrooke’s harbormaster, Killian Jones. But now, watching Robin with his children, she understood the phrase. She felt a deep pull inside her, a yearning to have another child with Robin. But that was a secret desire she knew would never get fulfilled. Instead, she would have to be satisfied with more moments like this with Robin, Sophie and Roland.

Sophie didn’t need a cast. Dr. Whale gave her a special brace to wear for at least a week. “Just rest it and it will heal,” he told her.

“So it’s not the entire summer,” Regina said. “You’ll feel better in no time.”

“But I’ll have it for the Summer Festival. This was to be my first ball.” Sophie sulked.

Dr. Whale stood in front of her, crossing his arms. “Did I say you couldn’t go to the ball?”
“No,” Sophie replied, perking up. “So I can go? And have my first father-daughter dance?”

Whale shrugged. “If Dad stays around, yes.”

“I’m in the room,” Robin said from his chair, arms crossed. He glared at Whale. “And I’m not going anywhere.”

“Okay. Testy.” Whale held up his hands, walking away.

Robin stood, approaching Sophie. She leaned into him, resting against his shoulder again. He ran a hand through her hair. “So, what’s this about a ball?”

“It’s tradition. The Summer Festival ends with a ball that serves as a way to raise money for Storybrooke. Children who are ten and older are allowed to go for the first few hours. I’ve been looking forward to this for years,” she said.

He smiled. “Well, do I need to get a tuxedo? I want to look my best for my first father-daughter dance as well.”

“Tuxedos are nice but not necessary. Most men wear black suits to the ball,” Regina told him. “If you have one, you should be fine.”

She helped Sophie down from the examination table and the girl leaned against her. Regina smiled at Robin and Roland. “Shall we go grab lunch? My treat.”

“Lunch sounds great.” Robin held out his hand and Sophie took it, smiling up at him.

He gave her hand a squeeze, walking out with Roland on the other side. For a long time, Sophie had wondered what it would feel like to have a traditional family. To have two parents and a sibling. Maybe even a dog. She didn’t have the dog yet, but she now had her father and a brother. And so far, it was everything she had imagined.

(Maybe she could convince him to get a dog as all attempts on her mother were fruitless. She could enlist Roland’s help as well).

Roland skipped along next to them. “Is there such a thing as a brother-sister dance?” he asked.

“Not that I know of,” Sophie replied. “Why?”

“Because I want to share a dance with you too!”

She smiled and shrugged. “We can have our own dance at home. How’s that?”

“Okay. But I wanted to dance at the ball.”

Regina caught up with them and she placed a hand on Roland’s back. “Well, you’d have to wait a few years. I’m afraid you’re still too young.”

The boy pouted and Sophie understood. She had hated watching her mother and aunts dress up year after year, unable to go to such a sophisticated party. But she did have fun with the other children at the giant sleepover hosted at the rec center. “You have your own party to go to Roland,” she said. “And it’s lots of fun.”

“Really?” he asked.

Regina nodded. “You get to play games with the other children, watch movies, eat pizza and popcorn, and get to sleep on a basketball court.”
“Cool!” Roland looked up at his father with pleading eyes. “Can I go to that?”

Robin chuckled. “Of course. After all, I have a very beautiful young lady to escort to her first ball.”

Sophie beamed at her father’s compliment. He let go of her hand to wrap his arm around her, pulling her closer. She leaned against him, heart beating faster from her joy.

“What about Ms. Regina? Aren’t you going to take her too?” Roland asked.

Robin frowned. “I’m sure Ms. Regina has a date already. Right?”

“Actually, you stole mine,” Regina replied with a smile. “So I guess I’m going solo.”

Sophie smiled. “We can all go together. You, me and Daddy.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Robin said, kissing her head as her mother agreed. Sophie was filled with joy at the thought of going to her first ball with her family.

It was beyond her dreams.

They went to a place called Granny’s Diner. Regina insisted it was the best place to eat. “And it’s the center of town life. If you want to know anything that’s happening in Storybrooke, come here. You’ll find out everything within minutes,” she said, opening the door.

People called out greetings to their mayor and her daughter as she led them to a booth. Regina appeared to be well-liked and popular as mayor, which made him feel proud of her. He had always known she could rule the world one day and it seemed she was well on her way to do that.

It was also a bit intimidating. Everyone knew and loved Regina and Sophie. He was no doubt being judged, with everyone wondering if he was worthy to be around the two. For some reason, it seemed worse than when he met Marian’s father.

Maybe because the stakes are higher.

An older woman with curly white hair and a friendly smile came over to their booth. “Good afternoon, Madame Mayor. And to you, Little Miss Sophie.”

“Hello, Granny,” Sophie replied, smiling. “How are you?”

“I’m well. Though I’m hoping you’ll introduce me to your two handsome dining companions,” Granny said, winking.

Regina laid her hand on Robin’s arm. “This is Robin Locksley and his son Roland.”

“They’re my dad and brother,” Sophie added.

Granny tilted her head, studying them. Robin held his breath, waiting to see if he would pass his first test. When she smiled, he let it out.

“It’s nice to meet you two. Welcome to my humble establishment. Everything on the menu is good but I am biased.” She winked at him. “So take your time and I’ll be back in a few minutes to take your orders.”
She walked off and Robin let out a sigh of relief. Regina noticed and smiled. “You know the saying ‘It takes a village’? Yeah, all of Storybrooke had a hand in Sophie’s upbringing.”

“And Henry’s and Lily’s,” Sophie added.

Robin smiled. “It sounds like the town raises all the children. Roland will be in good hands.”

He ran his hand through his son’s hair, glad he chose a great town to finally settle the two of them down in. And that he had friends here already. They weren’t going to have to go through this alone now.

Once their meals were ordered, Sophie asked to show Roland the games in the small arcade Granny had set up in the back of the diner. Regina gave them some quarters and told them to stay where they could be seen from the booth.

Robin studied Regina, still surprised that her date to the ball was just Sophie. It didn’t seem right. Were the men in this town that blind that they weren’t climbing over each other to get to Regina? He knew he would be...if he hadn’t blown that chance years ago.


He grew sheepish. “Sorry. I guess...You really didn’t have a date to the ball?”

“I did. Sophie.”

“Regina, you know what I meant.”

She sighed. “Just ask me, Robin. Don’t play these games. They aren’t your style.”

“Fine.” He took a deep breath. “Do you have a boyfriend?”

“No. Do you have a girlfriend?”

He shook his head. “Honestly, I haven’t been in one place long enough for one since Marian left.”

“So neither of us have significant others we have to try and get along with for Sophie’s sake. Makes things easier,” Regina said.

Robin nodded, but it still didn’t seem possible. Dating as a single parent was hard, but Regina had a town full of babysitters. And there had to be a man who would make her happy and be a good stepfather to Sophie. (Not that he wanted anyone else to have a fatherly role in Sophie’s life now that he was in it, but he always had a bit of a possessive streak he wasn’t proud of). So why hadn’t she found him?

Perhaps she hasn’t been able to move on from you the same way you’ve been unable to move on from her, a treacherous voice whispered.

Robin pushed that hope down as he realized he was staring at Regina, who gave him an odd look. He cleared his throat. “Sorry. I guess I’m surprised. You’re quite a catch. And I know from experience.”

“You’re flattering me,” she said.

“But you can blame? You’re the one who controls whether or not I see my daughter.” When she opened her mouth, no doubt to protest that she wouldn’t keep Sophie from him now, he held up his hand. “I was joking, Regina.”
“So you don’t think I’m a catch?” There was twinkle in her eye that told him she was teasing him.

But he responded with sincerity. “Of course I do. I was a fool to let you go.”

“I was a fool as well,” she replied, sincere as well. She laid her hand on top of his.

Their eyes met and Robin swallowed. All his feelings bubbled up, wanting to be expressed. He wanted to tell her that he never stopped loving her and to beg her to give him another chance. That he would never let her go again if she did. “Regina, I…”

“Oh, I have three burgers and an order of chicken nuggets but I only see two people,” Granny said, approaching the table. “Want to call the children?”

Regina nodded, sliding out of the booth. Granny set the plates down and frowned as she looked at him. “You look like they just cancelled Christmas. What’s wrong?”

“What?” He looked up then shook his head. “Oh, no. Just thinking about the logistics of setting up my headquarters here in Storybrooke. That can make anyone look cross.”

Granny tilted her head. “I’ll let it slide for now. But I saw how you were looking at our esteemed mayor. If I were you, I’d go for it.”

“I blew that chance a long time ago.”

“Not necessarily so. You’ll never know unless you chance it.”

Regina returned to the table with their children in tow and everyone sat down to eat their meal. Granny came back, this time carrying milkshakes. “On the house, to celebrate this new little family,” she said.

“Thank you, Granny,” Regina said. “You’re the best.”

Picking up his vanilla shake, Robin raised it high. “Then to the combined Locksley-Mills clan. We may not be a traditional family but we are our own kind of family.”

“Here, here.” Regina raised her glass as well. Sophie and Roland followed their parents’ examples and they clinked glasses.

As they drank their milkshakes, Robin tried to ignore how right this felt. How they could be an official family. This was his lot in life and he knew it was more than he deserved. So he would be happy with it.

Chapter End Notes

Woot! Chapter 4 is out! I know it took a while and I thank you for your patience. I don’t think Chapter 5 will be out before the New Year, so…happy holidays if this is my only fic you read!

This was a bit more Robin and Regina heavy, but we’ll get more Sophie next chapter. And this won’t be as slow of a burn as “The Nanny.” I promise.

Thanks again for all your support!
--Mac
“Who’s ready for some Summer Festival fun?” Emma barged into Regina’s house, Henry in tow. Regina sighed. She loved Emma dearly but her friend had no respect for personal space. Glaring at her, she crossed her arms. “How many times do I have to ask you to knock?”

“I’m surprised you haven’t just given up,” Emma said, plopping down on the couch. “Mal has.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to.”

Sophie bounced into the room, wearing a bright pink t-shirt over her jean shorts so she could be spotted in the crowd. “Hi, Henry! Hi, Aunt Emma!”

“Hey, Sophie. How are you feeling?” Emma asked.

“Okay. It’s not broken but I do have to wear this for a week or two.” Sophie held up her black bandage.

Henry rubbed her back. “At least it’s not a cast.”

“And I’m sure you can still go on all the spinny rides until you puke,” Emma added.

Regina glared at her daughter’s godmother. “Then you get to sit next to her so it ends up on you. I’ll take Henry.”

“Cool,” he replied, grinning as his mother called him a traitor.

Picking up her wristlet, Regina turned to her small party. “Okay. I told Robin and Roland we’d meet them in a few minutes, so let’s head down to the boardwalk.”

“Robin and Roland, huh?” Emma raised an eyebrow as she stood. “You’ve been spending a lot of time with them.”

“They’re also Sophie’s family. And they don’t know many people in this town aside from us.” Emma shrugged. “Whatever you say. I hope the sailing is smooth on the SS Denial.”

“Come on, Sophie, Henry. We’re going,” Regina said, ignoring her friend. “The children cheered, rushing ahead of her to get out of the house.”

“Regina, wait.” Emma grabbed her arm gently. “Look, you know I’m only having fun, right?”

Regina sighed. “I know. But I don’t want to get Sophie’s hopes up. With all that happened between me and Robin…I don’t want her to think her parents could reunite. That’ll only disappoint her.”

“Do you want to get back together with Robin?”
“I do,” she admitted softly. “I just don’t know if we can. We’ve lived a decade of our lives apart, he moved on and had a family… Just because it didn’t work out for him doesn’t mean that he wants to get back together with me. I wouldn’t blame him if he didn’t.”

“Maybe he does. Maybe you two need to have a conversation about it. But I’ll lay off the jokes,” Emma promised. “Now come on before the kids realize we’re not following.”

Regina and Sophie didn’t live far from where the Summer Carnival set up, so they all walked to the boardwalk. Sophie and Henry led the way as their mothers lagged behind. He glanced over his shoulder. “What do you think they’re talking about?”

“Probably my father.”

“How are you two getting on?” Henry asked.

Sophie beamed. “So far, so good. And Roland is really excited about me being his sister. I have a brother, Henry. How cool is that?”

“Don’t rub it in, Mills. Or is it Locksley now?”

“I’m still a Mills,” she replied. “And you never know. Aunt Emma and Killian could get married and give you a sibling.”

Henry shrugged. “I guess it wouldn’t be too bad. He does make Mom really happy and he’s pretty cool to have around.”

“And Lily and I have always wanted to be flower girls.”

“You’ve always wanted to be a flower girl,” he replied. “Lily just wants to pelt people with rice.”

Sophie laughed. “Too true.”

The Ferris wheel loomed large over them, its white lights reflected on the ocean water below. Excitement built in Sophie and she turned to Henry. “Ready to race?”

“Of course,” Henry replied, taking his position. “On your mark, get set…”

“Go!” they yelled together, sprinting off.

It was an annual tradition, the race of the last few yards to the ticket booth that would allow them into the carnival. Their sneakers thumped against the boardwalk as they ran toward the booth, spotting Mal and Lily waiting for them. Sophie’s heart leapt when she saw her father and Will also waiting there with Roland. It gave her a boost and she pulled ahead.

“And crossing the finish line to win this year’s Carnival Race is Sophie Mills,” Lily announced, pretending to talk into a microphone.

Roland jumped up and down. “Yay, Sophie!”

She gave him a high five before holding out her hand to Henry. “Good race,” she said.

“You too,” he said, shaking her hand. “Congrats on winning.”

Regina and Emma showed up then, smiling at everyone. “Do we need to get tickets?” Regina asked.
“I got tickets for the four of us,” Robin replied, holding them out. “I hope you don’t mind. After all you’ve done, I wanted to treat you.”

“No, of course not. Thank you, Robin.” Regina pulled Sophie close, hugging her. Sophie smiled, excited to spend the night with her growing family.

Emma sighed. “I guess that leaves me to get tickets. I’ll be right back.”

“No need,” Killian Jones said, approaching the group. “I bought tickets for you, me and the lad.”

“Thank you.” She glanced around before kissing Killian.

Mal rolled her eyes. “All this romance is making my stomach turn. Let’s go get on something that spins. Maybe I’ll feel normal.”

“Is she always like that?” Robin whispered to Regina. Sophie giggled before leaning against her father.

Robin kissed the top of her head, wrapping his arm around her. “How are you feeling?” he asked her.

“Okay. The wrap Dr. Whale gave me feels heavy and movement can be a bit difficult,” Sophie replied, wiggling her fingers.

Roland frowned. “Can you still ride the rides?”

“Dr. Whale said I could,” Sophie replied, smiling at her brother. “I should be able to do all the ones Mom lets me ride on. And maybe a few of the ones she won’t?”

She gave her father a pleading look, smiling as sweetly as she could. He returned it, leaning down. “Oh no you don’t. You will not be playing your mother and me off each other. Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” she mumbled, hanging her head. She felt him kiss it again before he pulled her close once more.

Mal urged everyone to head toward the rides and Robin kept his arm around Sophie as they walked. His other hand was clasped onto Roland’s and she watched as the boy reached up to take her mother’s hand with his free one. Regina smiled down at him. They looked like a real family, Sophie thought as they approached their first ride.

Roland stood at the entrance to the tilt-a-whirl, looking apprehensive. The ride operator had measured him and assured him he was tall enough now to go on the ride. But as he watched it, Sophie believed he was already turning green. She glanced up at their father, to see if he saw the same thing she did.

Frowning, Robin crouched down in front of his son. “Do you want to sit this out, Roland? I’ll sit it out with you.”

“I think so,” Roland said, curling against Robin. “It looks like it’ll make my tummy upset.”

“If you want, I can stay with him. I’m not much for spinning rides myself,” Belle offered, sliding up to the group.

Roland lit up when he saw her. “Hi, Miss Belle!”

“Hello, Roland,” she replied, crouching down to look him in the eye. “I’ve missed you in the
library.”

“I’ve been spending time with my sister. Oh, and thank you for helping me pick out a book for Sophie,” Roland said, smiling shyly.

Belle smiled. “Glad to be of service.”

“And you don’t mind staying with him?” Robin asked as she stood up.

“No, I don’t mind. I’ve watched these three a few times at this festival as well.” She motioned toward Sophie, Henry and Lily.

Sophie smiled, knowing that Belle had sat outside the haunted mansion with her every year while everyone else went through to be scared out of their minds. The two often talked books while they waited and she loved it. Belle was almost like a cool older sister and she was sure Roland would love spending time with the woman as well.

“Thank you,” Robin told Belle before crouching to be eye level with his son. “You be good for Miss Belle, okay? We’ll be right back.”

Roland nodded, taking the librarian’s hand as the others hurried into the ride area. Sophie hopped into a car with her mother and watched as her father continued walking. Frowning, she called out: “Daddy? Aren’t you going to ride with us?”

“Not this time, sweetheart. I don’t want to hurt your arm,” he said, motioning to her wrist. “So you ride with your mother and I’ll go on the next ride with you. Promise.”

Disappointed, Sophie nodded and watched as he climbed in next to Will. She crossed her arms as Regina wrapped her arm around the girl. “This is only the first ride, Sophie. You and your father will have plenty to go on together.”

“I know it’s just…I guess I wanted to make up for all the lost time,” Sophie replied.

Her mother sighed. “I know, sweetie. And you two will. I’m sure of it.”

Sophie glanced over at her father again. Robin smiled and made a heart with his hands, holding it over his chest. She rolled her eyes but it made her smile all the same.

The ride started up, spinning them around and around. Her stomach rose and sank with each twirl and she slid along the metal seat with her mother. They laughed together, holding hands as their insides were tossed about.

Once the ride came to a halt, the world continued to spin around Sophie. She saw two of her mother, both of whom were frowning. “Soph? Are you okay?”

“Dizzy,” she said.

“Okay, baby girl. Just take a few steps down and I’ll help you to a bench,” Robin said, his strong hands helping her off the ride.

She closed her eyes and her father half carried her over to a place where she could sit. He guided her head down between her knees. “Deep breaths, baby. You’ll be fine.”

“I’m not sure where she gets the motion sickness from,” she heard her mother say. “It doesn’t run in my family and I don’t have it.”
“It’s on my side,” Robin said, rubbing her back.

The nausea receded and Sophie sat up, the world righted again. Robin kissed her forehead. “Feeling better?”

She nodded. “Thanks, Daddy.”

“Don’t thank me. I’m the one who gave this to you.” He helped her up. “Why don’t we find a ride that doesn’t involve spinning?”

Robin wrapped his arm around her, holding Sophie close. She rested against him, smiling. This was going to be the best Summer Festival ever.

“Tell me, am I going to have to put up with your baby daddy for much longer?” Mal asked as they watched Robin play some of the boardwalk games with the children.

Regina sighed, rubbing her forehead. “Yes. He’s moving to Storybrooke with Roland so they can spend more time with Sophie.”

“And you?”

“Well, I’m Sophie’s mother,” she said before shrugging. “I don’t think he’s interested in romance right now. Especially with me.”

Mal raised an eyebrow. “Are you interested in a romance with him?”

“I told you that’s not a possibility.”

“But you would like it. I can hear it in your voice.”

Regina sighed. “I’ve never stopped loving him, Mal. And knowing he wasn’t the jerk I convinced myself he was has left me all confused.”

“Then I don’t think you should pursue anything with him.”

“I’m not!” she said, louder than she had intended. Emma glanced over at them and Regina shot her a smile to reassure her. She turned to Mal with a frown and spoke lower. “The only thing I’m doing is raising my daughter with him. That’s all.”

Mal nodded. “Fine. But tread carefully. I don’t want to see your heart get broken by him again.”

“I highly doubt that will happen,” Regina replied.

Their group came to a stop by the Ferris Wheel, where Mary Margaret Blanchard and David Nolan met up with them. He had his arm wrapped around the teacher’s shoulder and he smiled at them. “There you are! We were wondering where you had gone off to.”

“We’ve been enjoying the extreme rides,” Emma said. “You know, the ones you two are too chicken to go on.”

It was familiar banter. Despite their quieter and subdued personalities, both Mary Margaret and David loved a good rollercoaster ride. Emma just liked ribbing her partner and his fiancée.

“Uh huh. Says the woman who can’t do the parachute drop,” David shot back, pointing to the tower behind them. As if on cue, the people strapped into the vehicle screamed as they plunged
from the top to the bottom, slowing as they neared the ground.

Emma shuddered. “Yeah, no. I am not plunging to the ground like that. It’s a death trap.”

“It is?” Roland asked, frowning. He looked up at his father with fear in his eyes.

Regina gave Emma a little shove before bending down to look Roland in the eyes. “It’s not a death trap. Emma was just exaggerating. But we’re not going on that. We’re going on the Ferris Wheel.”

She pointed to the ride and Roland tilted his head. “We’ll be safe?” he asked her.

“Absolutely,” she said.

Roland bit his lip. “Will you ride with me? Please?”

She softened, squeezing his hand. “Of course, sweetie. Whatever you want.”

Lily, Sophie and Henry squeezed into one car and the operator shook his head. “This is your last year, kids. Next year, you’ll exceed the weight limit and will have to split up.”

“Aww,” they chorused before he moved them to load the next car.

As the children’s feet dangled above them, Regina climbed in with Robin and Roland. The operator lowered the bar, locking them in. He smiled at them. “Have a good ride, Madam Mayor.”

The ride jerked them forward and lifted them off the ground. Roland grabbed onto the bar as he watched the ground get further away. “I’m not sure about this,” he said, voice trembling.

“It’s okay,” she assured him. “Your father and I will keep you safe. Okay?”

Roland nodded, snuggling into her side. She glanced up and met Robin’s eyes, finding him smiling as he watched the two of them. “Look at the view, Roland,” he told his son. “You can see the ocean.”

“I can? Cool.” He leaned forward, watching the moonlight dance on the dark waves. “Can we go swimming?”

“Not now. The water’s too dark. But maybe another day,” Robin promised him.

Roland looked up at her. “Can you and Sophie come?”

“We’d love to,” Regina said, running her fingers through his soft curls. He leaned closer to her and she continued to do it.

They came to a stop at the top and Roland began to whimper. “Did the ride break down?”

“No, sweetheart. They stopped the ride to load more people and to let us enjoy the view,” Regina explained, continuing to run her fingers through his hair in order to reassure the boy.

Robin leaned down and pointed toward the horizon. “If you look really hard, you can see Nana and Pops all the way back in England.”

“Really?” Roland craned his neck, trying to see his grandparents. Robin caught her eye and gave her a wink.

Laughter and squeaking drew her attention to the car above them. She watched as it swung with a
“bit more force than was natural. “What are you three doing up there?” she called out.

“Nothing.” they chorused in unison.

Regina met Robin’s eyes and he raised his eyebrow in response. He glanced up. “Well, stop doing that type of nothing or no ice cream.”

“Yes, sir,” they chorused again.

“Very good,” Regina told him, giving him a small smile.

He returned it. “I am a father after all.”

“A good one.”

“I try to be,” he replied, running hand through Roland’s hair. The boy leaned against him, his eyelids starting to droop. Robin sighed. “I don’t think we’re going to make it to ice cream.”

Regina believed the same as the wheel began to turn again. She glanced behind her, watching Sophie laugh as her car began its descent. Turning back to Robin, she said: “It would break Sophie’s heart if you left. Why don’t I take him back to your place? We can do a kid swap later.”

“I do want to spend more time with Sophie.” Robin bit his lip before nodding. “Deal. You can take my car. Sophie and I can always get a ride.”

“Or you can take my car and we can do a swap later. After all, Sophie and I will need to get home.”

He shrugged, looking away. “Or you both can stay the night. We can do breakfast together in the morning—all four of us.”

Regina’s heart beat fast as their car neared the bottom. She knew he wasn’t asking her to sleep in his bed but she still saw it in her mind’s eye. The two of them curled up together as their children slept down the hall. In the morning, the four of them settled around a small table and enjoyed a meal together. While it was a sweet scene, it was also a dangerous wish. So she shook her head. “Sophie and I can go home. But we can meet you two for breakfast.”

“Oh, sure. That’s fine.” She heard the disappointment in Robin’s voice. But as the operator unlocked their car, he had a smile on his face again. “So I’ll see you in a few hours to exchange kids and cars?”

Regina nodded, picking up a sleeping Roland. “Absolutely. You have fun with Sophie.”

“Wait, what’s going on?” Sophie asked, approaching her parents.

Pulling her close, Robin kissed the top of her head. “You’re getting me all to yourself for the rest of the night.”

Sophie looked at her mother and Regina nodded. “I’m taking Roland home. Your father will take you and…”

“I’m going to sleep over at Daddy’s?” Her eyes brightened and she smiled widely. “Really?”

Regina hesitated, meeting Robin’s eyes. He gave her a pleading look she knew so well, even eleven years later. So smiling, she nodded. “Fine. You can sleep over at your father’s. He’ll take you home and you can pack an overnight bag.”
Sophie let out a little squeal, causing Roland to squirm in Regina’s arms. Quieting down, Sophie kissed her mother’s cheek. “Thanks, Mom. You’re the best.”

“Thank you, Regina,” Robin whispered after he kissed Roland’s forehead. “This does mean the world to me.”

“I know. You three deserve time to become a family.” She adjusted Roland and walked away, heading to Robin’s car. With every step, she wondered where she fit in with that little family and if it was the role she wanted to play.

Robin leaned against the railing that kept people from falling into the Tunnel of Love. Most of their party had climbed on it, including Will and Belle to his surprise. He didn’t comment on it, not wanting to spook his friend. Will had about as much luck in love as Robin had the past few years and deserved a chance at it.

The children were sitting at a nearby table, splitting a banana split between the three of them. It would give them a sugar rush to last them probably another hour before they would be ready to head home, he figured.

“So, tell me, what exactly are your intentions with Regina?” Mal asked, leaning against the railing with him.

He frowned. “What do you mean? We’re trying to co-parent.”

“And is that it?”

“Yes,” he replied, studying her. She regarded him with cold eyes and a frown, as if already judging him unworthy. It put him on edge. “You don’t like me do you?”

She shook her head. “No, I don’t. And I don’t care what she’s told herself. You abandoned her when she needed her the most.”

Robin glanced back down in the dark waters of the attraction. “I guess I did. So that’s it? I don’t get a second chance?”

“In my book? No. But you’re lucky. You just have to care about Regina. And she’s giving you a second chance.”

“She’s giving me a chance to be Sophie’s father,” he clarified. “I’m pretty sure I’ve lost any chance I have at another romance with her.”

Mal shrugged. “Well, I wouldn’t say never. Regina is a very forgiving sort.”

“She is,” he agreed.

“And how long do you plan on staying around? You know, before you go off to start up another one of your camps and never come back?”

Robin looked up at her, finding her staring back at him with a fire in her eyes. He took a deep breath. “I plan on staying in Storybrooke. I may have to leave to see to camps, yes, but my base of operations will be here. Roland needs roots and Sophie needs a father.”

“I think Sophie’s been fine without you.”
“True,” he allowed. “Then let me rephrase, counselor. Sophie wants a father. That’s why she sought me out. And now that we found each other, I don’t plan to lose her again.”

Mal snorted. “Pretty words.”

“I mean them.”

“We’ll see,” she said, watching as Mary Margaret and David emerged from the tunnel, arms wrapped around each other as they cuddled together. Belle and Will were right behind them, sitting very close together. She then sighed when she saw Killian and Emma emerged. “They’re like teenagers, I swear.”

Robin glanced over from Will and Belle to find the two in question making out. Killian had his hand buried in Emma’s blonde locks and she was fisting his shirt to pull him closer. They were oblivious to the fact they were no longer in the tunnel.

“So does he pass?” he asked her, motioning to Killian as the boat floated past them.

“For now,” she replied. “He doesn’t have the same baggage you do.”

He nodded. “Right.”

“How’s your wrist?” he asked her.

She held it close. “Okay.”

He raised his eyebrow and crossed his arms. “Is it really? Or are you just saying that?”

“I want to ride more rides with you,” she admitted. “And it doesn’t hurt that bad.”

“But it does hurt. You should’ve told me so we could’ve gotten you some medicine.”

Sophie looked hesitant. “I don’t want to go home. I don’t want this night to end.”

Robin took her hand and led her to a bench, sitting down. He helped her onto his lap and held her close. “I get it, sweetheart, but we have tomorrow and all the days after that. We have so many more memories to make together.”

“You promise?” she asked, tears filling her eyes.

She had heard the conversation with Mal, he realized. Tucking her head under his chin, he rubbed her arm. “Your Aunt Mal has her concerns and she’s allowed to. But I promise you that I will always be there for you. I love you, Sophie.”

“I love you too, Daddy.” She sniffed. “And I lied. My wrist does hurt pretty bad.”

He nodded, setting her down. “Let’s go get you some medicine for your arm and then we’ll find a ride we can do together.”

Sophie felt herself fading and her eyelids were growing heavy. Despite her father’s reassurances, she still didn’t want the night to end. It was turning out to be everything she dreamed of, she thought as she leaned against him again as the ride came to a stop.
He held her tightly. “Are you getting tired?”

“No,” she said before her yawn gave her away. “Maybe.”

“Okay, then maybe we should head back to your house so you can pack your overnight bag.”

Emma nodded, pulling her sleepy son close as well. “I think we should all call it a night. Get some rest ahead of tomorrow’s ball.”

They all bid each other goodnight before Sophie led her father toward her house. Emma and Henry went with them, after she bid Killian a very passionate good night. Henry and Sophie scrunch their noses and she said: “Eww.”

Chuckling, Robin pulled her close. “I hope you think that for a long time yet. I am not ready for you to have a boyfriend.”

“I had one already,” she replied, trying not to laugh at the horrified look on his face.

Henry, though, did. “It was Craig Jordan in first grade and lasted until the end of recess when he then chose Stella D’Ambrosio as his line buddy.”

Relief spread across her father’s face. “Oh thank god.”

“What do you mean? I was heartbroken!” Sophie said, exaggerating as she leaned against him.

“Oh, of course. My poor princess,” he replied, though not as sincere as he could’ve been. She imagined it would’ve been the same thing he’d have done back when she was in the first grade.

Robin turned to Emma and Killian. “Are you two done? Or should we leave without you?”

They broke apart, looking guilty. Emma nodded. “Sorry, I’m coming. I’ll see you tomorrow, Killian.”

“You too, Emma.” He turned to Henry, giving the boy a wave. “I’ll see you then too.”

“Bye, Killian!” Henry waved back as Emma wrapped her arm around his shoulders.

The four of them started to head toward Regina’s house as Emma turned to Robin. “So, Robin, where are you staying?”

“Not far from Regina’s,” he replied. “It’s a little cottage close to the water but nothing for the long-term. I’ll probably start looking at other places next week after everything calms down from the Summer Festival.”

Emma nodded. “There are a few places available by me. You still wouldn’t be too far from Regina and Sophie.”

“Henry and I walk to each other’s houses all the time,” Sophie added. “I could walk to yours if you live by Aunt Emma.”

“True. But don’t worry. I doubt I’ll ever be far from you no matter where I settle in this town.” He kissed the top of her head.

She smiled, imagining running to his house after school or spending the night like she was about to do on a regular basis. He would always be around, no matter what Aunt Mal thought.
They approached her house and Emma stopped at her yellow bug. She hugged Sophie before shaking Robin’s hand. “Have a good night, you two. We’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Good night, Aunt Emma. You too, Henry,” Sophie said before bounding up her porch steps. She opened a secret compartment in their mailbox and pulled out the spare key, opening the front door.

Robin chuckled as he followed her inside. “Do you need help packing? Given your wrist?”

“Could you?” she asked, smiling at him. “Thank you.”

Sophie led him up to her room, flicking on the light. It was painted a light green hue that made her feel like she was sleeping in the forest. Posters and pictures dotted the walls. Her dolls were organized by one of her windows and all her toys sat in a toy box. Stuffed animals were piled high on her bed for now.

Opening her closet, Sophie pulled out her black rolling luggage with her name embroidered on it in red thread. She placed it on her bed and opened it. “How much do I need?” she asked her father.

“You’re only staying the night, Soph. Not that much,” he replied. “Your pajamas, some fresh clothes for the morning. And your toothbrush.”

“Oh, okay,” she said, disappointed. Part of her knew it was only for the night but there had been part of her that hoped for longer.

Robin knelt down in front of her. “Look, once the Summer Festival is over and your mother has more than a minute to think, I’ll talk to her and see if you can spend a week with me and Roland. How’s that?”

Sophie beamed and threw her arms around him. “Thank you, Daddy. I’d love that.”

“Good,” he said, tightening his hold on her. They embraced for a bit longer and she enjoyed how loved she felt in his arms. It was like when her mother hugged her—safe, warm and loving.

His arms fell away and Robin stood. “Okay, princess. Let’s get you packed up and go home. I think we’re both ready for bed.”

She nodded, piling things into her suitcase with glee. Even just a night with her father meant more hugs and just more time with him than she had before. Sophie was going to cherish every moment as she got to know her father better. Grabbing Little Applesauce, the stuffed pony he gave her, she tucked it away before turning to her father. “All set. I’ll show you where my mother keeps her car keys.”

Regina had to admit the small cottage Robin was renting was nice for a summer getaway but not to live in year-round. It had two floors, with three bedrooms and a bathroom on the top floor. The lower floor was just a living room, a kitchen and a small room with a washer and dryer. It made her feel claustrophobic and she was certain Robin would want more space for him, Roland and Sophie.

She rubbed her head as she sat on the couch, knowing she and Robin were going to have to work out a visitation schedule. He deserved to have alone time with Sophie and more than just a night here or there. But that could wait for the lawyer Mal recommended and for when Regina could think of something other than the Summer Festival.
Curiosity had her exploring the house a bit more. Robin had put up some pictures to make the place feel homier and she looked at each of them. A few were familiar—she remembered seeing them that summer they were together, ones of his family and when he was younger. Most, though, were taken after as they documented Roland growing up. She picked up one of little Roland sitting in his high chair, spaghetti in his curls and marinara sauce covering his face. He beamed at his father behind the camera, just like his sister had beamed at her when she was his age and looked the same.

Regina found herself wandering into Robin’s room, feeling bold. It wasn’t much as he hadn’t occupied the space for too long. She found a few suits in his closet but most of his clothing as still in his large forest green luggage. It lay open at the foot of his bed and she glanced at it as she walked around the room. A picture frame caught her attention, causing her to kneel down and pull it out.

Inside was a picture of him and her from that summer. They were sitting around a fire, wrapped in a blanket together. Robin was watching her as she smiled, no doubt in mid-story. When she spoke, he always made her feel like she was the only person there. She had to admit she missed that feeling.

She missed him.

The sound of a car pulling up startled her before she could really contemplate what it meant that he had packed that picture to bring with him. Regina shoved it back in Robin’s luggage and she hurried downstairs. She hit the landing just as the door opened, Sophie rolling her luggage inside.

“Hi, Mom!”

“Hello, sweetheart,” Regina said, hugging her daughter. “Did you have a lot more fun at the festival?”

“We did. Though I made it very clear to Sophie that she isn’t going to be riding the Tunnel of Love for a very long time.” Robin gave their daughter such a pointed Dad look, Regina couldn’t help but laugh as warmth spread through her.

Sophie rolled her eyes and let out an exasperated “Daddy!”

“Well, I’m glad you had fun,” Regina replied, smiling.

Robin nodded. “We did. And how was Roland? Did you have any problems?”

“Of course not. He slept all the way home, waking up long enough for me to get him in his pajamas. And he’s been sound asleep since.”

“Good.” He turned to Sophie. “Now you should get ready and head to bed. It’s been a long night.”

Sophie hugged her parents, wishing them both a good night. Robin carried her luggage upstairs, asking Regina to wait a few minutes. She stood at the bottom, peering up into the dim hallway as her heart pounded. He probably just wanted to arrange a pick up time for Sophie, she reminded herself. She didn’t want to spend the night anyway.

Robin came back down. “She’s brushing her teeth and has promised me she’ll go straight to bed but I don’t think this will be too long. What time do you want her home?”

“It doesn’t really matter,” Regina replied, fighting her disappointment even though she had expected this. “I guess I just need to have her home by the afternoon so we can get ready for the ball.”
“Do you want to have breakfast with us?” he asked.

It was a tempting offer, seeing him in his pajamas and with bedhead. But she shook her head. “This is your time with Sophie. Enjoy it.”

“Then lunch,” he said. “I insist. We can meet in Granny’s since Roland has been begging me for another milkshake from there. I also think the burgers are addicting.”

Regina pressed her finger to her lips. “It’s the secret to how we keep people from leaving Storybrooke. You must take it to your grave.”

“Of course,” he said, making a cross over his heart before smiling. “So I’ll see you tomorrow at twelve-thirty? Will that work?”

“Twelve-thirty is fine. So, I’ll let you get ready for bed. Good night, Robin,” she said. There was an awkward silence then between them as she figured out what to do next. Smile and leave? Shake his hand? Hug him? Air kiss?

Robin made the decision for them, wrapping his arms around her. She let him hold her close, inhaling his familiar pine scent. Closing her eyes, she could imagine it was eleven years earlier and they were locked in an embrace which promised to turn into something more passionate.

He pulled away, depositing her car keys in her hand as she returned to the present. She nodded, picking up her purse as she headed for the door.

“Regina,” Robin said, stopping her in her tracks. She turned slowly to look at him, watching as a debate raged in his eyes. There were clearly many things he was considering to say to her and she held her breath, waiting to see which one it was.

At last, he smiled and said: “Drive safely, okay? And text me when you get home so I know, please?”

“I will,” she promised before stepping out of his house. She hurried to her car, climbing in. As she started it, she saw he stood in the doorway, watching her to make sure she was safe. It made her smile again, her heart skipping a beat as she waved at him before backing out of the driveway.

She headed back to her house, a sinking feeling in her stomach. With every block she put between herself and Robin’s cottage, she couldn’t help but feel she was going in the wrong direction.

Chapter End Notes

It lives! I blew the proverbial dust off this and we’re back! So sorry for the delay—my holiday writing took a lot longer than I expected.

We will get to that ball, I promise. Especially as there’s some forward momentum on the Outlaw Queen front planned for it.

I hope to see everyone soon with the next chapter!

--Mac
Chapter 6: Belles of the Ball

Despite the late night, Robin still woke around nine the following morning. He sat up, stretching as the sun illuminated the picture frame he had finally set up next to his bed. It was one of his favorite pictures of him and Regina, the two wrapped up in his blanket as a fire crackled in front of him. He had kept it by his bedside for years, even when he thought Regina had moved on. When he met Marian, he finally put it away. After she left, he pulled it out as a reminder that once upon a time, he had been happy and someone had loved him.

Someone who might still love him.

He put that thought out of his mind as he went to check on Roland. All he could see was the top of his dark curls, so the boy still sound asleep. Robin closed the door and moved onto the next room, opening it to see Sophie was asleep as well. She clutched the stuffed pony he had given her, her black wrist brace standing out against its crème coloring. Her dark eyelashes fluttered as she sighed in her sleep, looking so much like her mother it caused a physical ache in his chest.

Robin closed her door and composed himself. He had his daughter and Regina’s friendship at least. That was enough.

It had to be.

He went down to the kitchen, debating what to make for breakfast. As he went through his options, Robin realized that he didn’t know what Sophie preferred. Did she like pancakes? Or did she prefer waffles? Was she a fan of sugary cereals? Knowing Regina, he doubted that one. How did she take her eggs? Did she even like eggs?

Perhaps he should call Regina. She probably was still a morning person, so he wouldn’t be waking her.

Robin shook his head. He could just ask Sophie when she woke up. Talking to her was the only way he would get to know her better after all.

“Daddy? Is something wrong?” She entered the kitchen, yawning as her dark hair stuck out in several different directions.

He straightened up and smiled as he pulled her in for a hug. “Nothing. I was just wondering what we should have for breakfast. Do you like pancakes?”

“Of course!” Her eyes lit up and she beamed at him. “With chocolate chips?”

“Oh…Uh, I don’t have any. Is that okay?” he asked, hesitant.

The light faded from her eyes and her smile drooped a bit but she nodded. “Regular pancakes are fine.”

Robin felt like he had already disappointed her but he kept his smile up. “Good. How about some orange juice?”
She nodded and he motioned for her to take a seat at the table. He poured her a glass of orange juice and set it in front of her. Crouching next to her, Robin smiled. “How did you sleep, sweetheart?”

“Good,” she said. “I dreamed we were still at the carnival and we did all the rides. But the haunted mansion. Too creepy.”

“Definitely too creepy,” he agreed, pulling out the ingredients for pancakes. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her rest her chin on her arms. “Everything okay, Soph?”

She shrugged. “I guess I miss Mom.”

That was understandable. He and Roland had their routine so no doubt Regina had hers with Sophie. So they were going to have to find their new routine.

“Do you want to help me make the pancakes?” he asked, pulling out the box of pancake mix.

Sophie perked up. “I’d love to!”

Robin watched as she measured the pancake mix and dumped it into the bowl before helping her crack open the eggs. They mixed everything together, his hand guiding hers as she used the whisk. “Can I also flip them? Mom doesn’t let me,” she said.

“While I’m sure she has her reasons,” he replied, “yes, you may. As long as I’m helping you and you are very, very careful.”

Sophie stood as close to the stove as he would allow and didn’t complain when he insisted on guiding her hand as she flipped the pancakes. It ensured she didn’t burn her arm as well as gave Robin an excuse to be close to her. One by one, they flipped the pancakes as each side got golden brown.

He kissed her head after their first stack. “Very good.”

“Can we make more?” she asked.

“Of course! That’s certainly not going to feed all three of us. I don’t know about you, but your brother and I eat lots of pancakes.”

She laughed. “Good. I want to flip lots of pancakes.”

After they had enough to start with, Robin turned off the stove and told her to have a seat at the table. “I’ll go wake up your brother,” he said. “The syrup is in the fridge. Help yourself.”

Robin climbed the stairs and entered the room Roland was staying in until they could find a permanent home in Storybrooke. He crouched down next to the bed, shaking his son gently. “Roland, it’s time to wake up.”

His son groaned, rolling away from him as he placed a pillow over his head. Robin sighed, rubbing his hand over his face. While he was a morning person, Roland had never been. It was something inherited from Marian, who had also liked to sleep in and had been difficult to rouse some mornings.

“Come on, my boy,” he said, shaking Roland harder this time. “I have two surprises in the kitchen but you can’t see them until you wake up.”

Sighing, Roland sat up. “Do I have to get dressed?”
“Not yet.” Robin picked up his son and carried him downstairs.

Once they got to the kitchen, Roland was wide awake and wiggled out of Robin’s arms. He raced over to the table and threw his arms around his sister. “Sophie! You’re having breakfast with us?”

“I spent the night, Ro,” she said. “And I’m here all morning.”

Roland cheered as Robin placed his plate down. “Take a seat, Roland, and eat your pancakes.”

“Pancakes? This is the best morning ever!” Roland exclaimed before sitting in his seat. He reached for the syrup and drowned his pancakes in it.

Grabbing a plate for himself, Robin sat down in between his two children. He reached over for the syrup, wincing at the sticky mess Roland had turned it into, and drizzled some over his pancakes. Beside him, Sophie had poured some syrup onto her plate, dipping her pancake pieces in it. She also had taken out the butter and placed some on her pancakes.

Roland watched her, confused. “Why did you put butter on your pancakes?”

“Because that’s how Mom and I eat them,” she replied. “It’s very good.”

“It’s weird,” he replied, scrunching his nose.

Sighing, Robin set his fork down. “Roland, it’s not weird. It’s just different. Now apologize to your sister.”

Roland made a face and Robin worried he would have to put his son in a timeout so early in the morning. But at last, the boy sighed and said: “I’m sorry, Sophie. If you like butter, then you can eat it with butter.”

“Thank you, Roland,” she said, though she wasn’t as chipper as she had been. Robin’s heart stuttered. This was not the experience he had wanted for her when she had come over the night before.

After they finished their first helping of pancakes and the children were on their seconds, Roland turned to Robin. “Are we talking to Nan and Pops today?”

Robin’s stomach jolted. He used video chat to talk with his parents every Saturday, giving them time to bond with their grandson as best as they could with an ocean apart. But he hadn’t yet told them about having a granddaughter. He didn’t want to spring Sophie on his parents or make her feel like she had to talk to people she had never met.

But Sophie perked up. “I can meet my grandparents?”

“If you want to,” he said, taking her hand. “I just have to talk to them first. Everything’s happened so fast, I haven’t gotten a chance to tell them about you yet.”

She frowned, her eyes growing wide. “Do you think they’ll like me?”

“They’ll love you,” he assured her, pulling her onto his lap. He held her close, rocking her. “Don’t worry about it, okay?”

“Okay.” She laid her head on his shoulder and he rubbed her arm. Everything was going to work out, he told himself. He would make it so for her.
Robin chased his children upstairs to get dressed while he cleaned up from breakfast. He heard Roland chattering with Sophie, though not what he was saying. It was homey and Robin couldn’t wait for the day it became the norm, not the exception. That having Sophie with them was second nature to them.

He quickly changed before setting up his laptop in the living room, connecting to the internet and calling his parents. As he waited for them to pick up, he wrung his hands together out of nervousness.

“Robin? Is that you?” His mother, Sara, appeared on the screen. She turned her head. “Richard! It’s Robin!”

“Tell him I’m coming,” he heard his father yell off-screen.

Sara shook her head before focusing on Robin. “Are you in a new house? It says you’re logging in from someplace called Storybrooke.”

“Storybrooke? Is that still in Maine?” His father, Richard, sat down next to Sara before waving at Robin.

“Yes, Dad, it’s still in Maine,” Robin replied, taking a deep breath. “Do you remember Regina Mills?”

Sara’s eyebrow went up. “Do we remember the woman who stole your heart? Yes, Robin, I believe we do. Is she back in the picture?”

“Kinda,” Robin replied, rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s a bit of a long story.”

“Can we get it in a nutshell?” Richard asked, sipping his tea.

Robin sighed. “Regina and I have a daughter.”

His parents blinked a few times and his father set down his teacup. “Never mind. Start from the beginning.”

When Robin finished, they were silent for several minutes. He shifted on the couch. “Can someone say something? Please?”

“It’s a lot to process, Robin,” Richard said at last. “We suddenly have a ten-years-old granddaughter we never knew about.”

“I know, I know. To be honest, I didn’t know about Sophie a week ago myself. But she’s an amazing young girl and Regina is being really great about letting us spend time together. She’s, uh, she’s here now. She spent the night.”

Sara straightened up. “We can meet her? Now?”

“If you want,” Robin stood and walked outside the living room to find Sophie on the stairs. He smiled at her. “You ready, sweetheart?”

She nodded, taking his hand. He led her to the couch, sitting very close to her and wrapping his arm around her. “Mum, Dad, this is Sophie. Sophie, these are your grandparents.”

“Oh goodness. You are beautiful,” Sara said, smiling as tears brimmed in her eyes. “Hello, sweet girl.”
“Hi,” Sophie replied, shy.

Richard moved closer to the screen, looking her over. “Well, Sophie, tell us about yourself. Nana and I are all ears.”

Leaning back, Robin listened as Sophie told his parents about her life in Storybrooke and about Regina. He was pleased that within a week of discovering he had a daughter, he knew most of the information already. Though he was a bit surprised to learn that Regina had gone ziplining on one of their vacations but was proud of how brave she had gotten.

He also watched Sophie, smiling as her eyes lit up as she talked with the grandparents she didn’t know she had. She had so many questions about England that he longed for the day he could take her there himself. Maybe he could even convince Regina to come with them, show both Mills women around his homeland.

“So, Robin, when will we meet Regina?” Richard asked him, forcing Robin to sit up again.

“I’ll have to talk to her about it,” he replied.

Sara nodded. “Good. We’d love to meet the mother of our granddaughter. And you need to bring both of them here soon.”

Times like these made him wonder if his mother could read minds. “Yes, Mum. I’d love to.”

“Now go get our grandson and we’ll continue this call,” Richard instructed. “Leave Sophie, we’ll entertain her while you’re gone.”

Robin rolled his eyes but went to retrieve Roland, who was lying on the stairs and groaning from impatience. He bounded into the living room, sitting on his father’s lap as the three of them continued to talk with Sara and Richard.

As he sat there with his children, Robin felt they were almost a family. There was just one person missing but he pushed that thought down, focusing instead on what he had—two beautiful children who he loved with his whole being. Sophie and Roland were his everything now.

Regina sat in Granny’s, waiting for Robin to arrive with Sophie and Roland. She watched the door, her stomach turning each time it opened.

“A watched pot never boils,” Granny told her, setting down the tea Regina ordered.

She thanked the older woman. “I know. I just hope Sophie’s first night with her father went well.”

“I’m sure it did. But are you worried for Sophie…or excited to see her father?” Granny asked, knowingly.

Regina gave her a look before sighing. “That door’s closed.”

“You sure? Because from what I’ve seen, he’s giving you the same pining looks you’re giving him.”

“I haven’t been giving him any looks,” Regina protested.

Granny glanced at her over her silver frames. “You keep thinking that, Madam Mayor. But I think you’d be very surprised if you made a move. Don’t let him get away again.”
The bell over the door chimed and she heard Sophie call out: “Mom! I got to meet my
grandparents. How cool is that?”

“That sounds awesome, sweetie,” Regina said, sliding out of the booth as Granny moved on.
Regina wrapped her arms around her daughter, holding her close. “Are they nice?”

Sophie nodded. “They’re the best. And they want to meet me in person. Can I go to England?”

“When exactly do you plan on going?” Regina asked, heart hammering in her chest. She wasn’t
sure she was ready to be parted from her girl for that long.

“Don’t worry, Regina. It won’t be for some time,” Robin answered, walking up with Roland
skipping beside him. “I’m about to buy a house so a trip to England will have to wait until
Christmas at the earliest.”

She let out a relieved breath and nodded. “Well, why don’t we have a seat and order lunch?
Sophie and I have a very busy afternoon planned getting ready for the ball.”

“Why?” Roland asked, confused. “You both are beautiful. Don’t you just have to put on your
dresses?”

“You are an adorable boost for my ego, young sir.” Regina picked the boy up and placed a big
kiss on his cheek. He laughed before wrapping his arms around her neck in a hug. She met
Robin’s eyes, a soft but unreadable expression in them.

She set Roland down and the quartet took their seats in the booth. Granny approached with menus
and Robin raised his hand. “You can keep mine. I already know I want a burger. Those are
delicious.”

“They are my specialty,” Granny replied, a twinkle in her eyes. She looked around the others.
“Anyone want a menu or do you all know what you want?”

Regina ordered a salad, knowing she would have a large meal at the ball, while Sophie followed
her father’s lead and ordered a hamburger. After ordering chicken fingers, Roland then added:
“And a vanilla milkshake, please?”

Granny laughed as she promised to bring him a milkshake, tucking her pad in her apron. “I’ll
leave you four alone for now.”

Once she was gone, Regina wrapped her arm around Sophie. “So, how was your first sleepover
with your father?”

“Good,” she replied, though Regina thought it was lacking some enthusiasm. “I had fun with him
and Roland.”

“I hope we can do it again soon and maybe for a bit longer. Perhaps a weekend?” Robin gave her
a hopeful look.

Regina smiled. “I think we can arrange that. Just after the ball when I can think straight again.”

“Of course,” he replied before looking at Sophie. “How would you like that, Soph?”

She shrugged. “Sounds fun.”

Her voice lacked enthusiasm and Regina saw Robin deflate a bit. She was concerned over what
had happened to change Sophie’s mind about spending time with her father. But she would have
“So, what exactly do you two have planned for this afternoon?” Robin asked, popping a French fry in his mouth.

“Well, we’re going for mother-daughter mani-pedis before going to get our hair done,” Regina explained. “Then it’s into our dresses before heading over to make sure everything is set up for the ball.”

He nodded. “So what time should I pick you up?”

“Oh, you don’t have to do that. You can just meet us at the ballroom.”

“Nonsense. What kind of man doesn’t pick up his dates and escort them to their destination? Just give me a time and I’ll be there.” He held her gaze, holding his ground.

Regina realized he wasn’t going to back down and deep down, she was touched. “Fine. How about five o’clock?”

“Sounds good,” he replied, smiling. “Now…dress colors? I need to make sure the corsages don’t clash.”

“Mom’s wearing red and black and I’m wearing gold,” Sophie replied.

He nodded. “I can work with that. Thanks.”

Regina turned to Roland, worried he might be feeling left out. “Are you looking forward to spending the night at the rec center?”

“Uh huh,” he said, nodding. “Uncle Will said he’s gonna help Miss Belle so he’ll be there too!”

“Really?” Regina glanced over at Robin, eyebrow raised.

He shrugged. “I’m not asking. I don’t want to do anything to mess this up…but my best friend may be falling for your town’s librarian.”

“Aww,” Sophie cooed, resting her head on her hand as a faraway look came to her eyes. Robin’s eyes narrowed. “None of that, young lady. You are too young for romance.”

“But it was all wrong,” Sophie said, pouting. “He didn’t have chocolate chips for the pancakes, the orange juice had pulp in it and Roland thought it was weird that I like butter on my pancakes.”

But for now, she could pretend otherwise.

Regina and Sophie sat in neighboring chairs as their feet soaked. She turned to her daughter. “Okay, you didn’t seem so excited about spending more time at your father’s. What happened?”

“It was all wrong,” Sophie said, pouting. “He didn’t have chocolate chips for the pancakes, the orange juice had pulp in it and Roland thought it was weird that I like butter on my pancakes.”

She was relieved that it was nothing serious and then felt guilty that she would suspect Robin of doing something to hurt Sophie. Reaching over, she took her daughter’s hand. “I’m sorry, sweetheart. But we decided everything last minute. He didn’t have time to get the things you like.”
“I guess,” she muttered.

“Well, next time, we’ll make sure that Daddy knows what you like. How’s that?” Regina paused. “You do want there to be a next time, right?”

Sophie nodded. “I do. Aside from breakfast, everything else was great. We played a few games before going to Granny’s. He’s really funny.”

“Then I’ll work something out with Daddy and I’ll make sure he has all the food you like. How’s that?” Regina asked.

“Good,” Sophie replied. “But I’ll still miss you.”

“You’ll only be at your father’s. And it won’t be for long stretches at a time. You’ll still be living with me full time.”

“I’m glad. I love Daddy, but it would be too strange not seeing you every day. To go down the hall and climb into your bed to talk. Or watch TV.”

Regina smiled. “I’d miss that too, sweetheart. I’d even miss yelling at you to not leave your shoes in the middle of the foyer where I can trip over them.”

Sophie laughed. “Sorry about those, Mom. I try.”

“Try harder.”

“Yes, Mom,” she sighed.

Regina chuckled. “Having second thoughts about not moving in with your father?”

“Absolutely not,” Sophie said, shaking her head. “I love you, Mommy.”

“Love you too, sweetheart.” Regina leaned back in her chair, waiting for her pedicure to be over so they could move onto the manicures.

Sophie felt like a princess. She stood in her room, twirling around in her gold dress, the organza skirt flowing out around her. Lace cap sleeves clung to her shoulders and her locket sat right in the V of the neckline. Her dark hair had been done up in large curls confined in a bun surrounded by a gold lace ribbon.

Regina had agreed to let her makeup artist put some on Sophie, so she was in seventh heaven. The soft pink lipstick and gold eyeshadow made her feel like a grown up. She was really going to enjoy the ball.

The doorbell echoed through the house and she heard her mother’s door open. “Sophie, that’s most likely your father. Can you go open the door and let him in?”

“Sure, Mom,” Sophie said, skipping down the stairs. She peered through the peephole just to be sure, smiling when she saw her father on the other side.

“Well, look at this beautiful young lady,” he said, pulling her in for a hug. “I’m going to be the envy of everyone at the ball.”

She giggled. “Wait until you see Mom. She’s gorgeous.”
“I bet,” he said softly, closing the door behind him. He then pulled out a plastic container that held flowers inside. “But for now, your corsage.”

Robin opened up the container and Sophie gasped at the white roses inside. She ran a finger over their silky petals before he slid them on her wrist. “Beautiful,” he said. “Just like you.”

She hugged her father again. “Thank you so much. I love it.”

They heard the sound of a camera going off and turned to find Regina standing on the steps, phone still raised as she reviewed the picture. “Definitely a keeper,” she said.

“Mom, you look like a queen,” Sophie said, awed. Regina wore a strapless dress with a crimson bodice and an empire waist. A black organza skirt fell in tiers from it, little teardrop pearls sewn into the material. She wore strappy open-toed heels under her dress, the dark red nail polish on her toes visible. The makeup artist had given her a smoky eye and used a shade of lipstick that was close to the color of her bodice. Regina had put on her pearl necklace and the matching earrings. A ruby ring with a platinum setting rested on her right ring finger.

Sophie glanced up to see her father’s reaction. He stood there, mouth open and an expression in his eyes she had only seen in movies—when the male lead saw the heroine all dressed up and in a more romantic way. A thought came to her, something she hadn’t considered before. Perhaps her father still loved her mother.

And maybe, just maybe, she still loved him. Especially given the soft but nervous smile she was giving him, awaiting his verdict. “Well?” she prompted.

“Stunning,” he declared, “in every way.”

Her mother blushed, her smile brightening. She went to brush her hair back before remembering it was pulled into a low bun with fake red flowers tucked into it. “Thank you. You look quite dapper in that suit.”

Robin tugged on his black suit jacket, smiling as well. “I had to look good for my dates, right?”

Sophie giggled before nudging Robin. “What about Mom’s corsage?”

“Oh, right!” He opened the container and pulled out the red rose corsage from it. “Milady?”

Regina held out her wrist and he slid it on. She admired the flowers. “It’s gorgeous, Robin.”

“Look at mine,” Sophie said, holding up her wrist.

“Just as beautiful.” Regina smiled before moving toward the small table by the front door. She picked up her clutch, putting her phone inside. “Are we ready to go?”

Robin nodded, pulling out his keys. “Your carriage awaits. And this one won’t turn into a pumpkin at midnight.”

Sophie took her mother’s hand as they walked out of the house, heading toward Robin’s SUV. He helped her in before helping Regina, hands lingering on her mother’s arms. She was going to have to watch her parents very carefully that night.

Perhaps romance would blossom at the ball.
Regina was beautiful.

He had thought her beautiful from the first moment he saw her as she struggled to carry a box up to her apartment. But over the years, she had managed to get more beautiful. And in that gorgeous dress, she looked like a queen out of a fairy tale book with Sophie as a beautiful princess.

It also served to remind him that Sophie was going to grow up to be just as beautiful as her mother. He started to worry about the dangers that still lurked in the world for women, scared he wouldn’t be able to protect her from them. Of course, she was ten years old. There still was time before she would have to face him, he prayed.

So it left him plenty of time to focus on Regina. He watched as she finalized everything for the ball, chatting with the band leader as well as someone from the catering hall. She was relaxed and smiled brightly, making him feel momentarily jealous. He then reminded himself he was being silly and tried to distract himself. It always failed and his attention always returned to her.

Robin liked to think he would’ve made a good politician’s husband. He would’ve supported her, counseled her and taken care of the children whenever she had to work late. And he knew how to stand there and smile, which had to be most of the job, right? They would’ve survived and thrived together.

“She looks beautiful tonight, doesn’t she?” Emma’s voice startled him. He glanced up and found her standing next to him wearing a sleek black column gown. Gold rings surrounded her neck, holding the dress up. Her blonde hair was done in a French twist and she had had her makeup done as well, a change from how he had seen her all week.

Emma sat down, giving him a knowing smile. “You can’t take your eyes off her.”

“Of course not,” he replied. “As you said, she does look beautiful tonight. So do you.”

“Thank you. But you’re not going to be staring at me all night long.”

“No, I won’t be. Wouldn’t want to end up in a fistfight with Killian over it. I doubt Regina would appreciate that.” He winked at Emma.

She frowned. “No, nor would I. I’m not the type of woman who appreciates men fighting over her like some possession.”

He swallowed, afraid he had gotten on Emma’s bad side. Mal already didn’t like him so he couldn’t risk alienating another one of Regina’s friends. “I’m sorry to have offended you. I don’t see Regina as some possession and trust me I know she can fight her own fights. I fell in love watching her chew someone up and spit them out. Quite impressive.”

Emma chuckled. “It is. And I’m still trying to get to know you. It might take some time to get used to your sense of humor.”

“And yours,” he replied. “But I’d like the chance. And if I offend, please tell me. I don’t want to do that.”

“You might be okay after all, Robin Locksley,” she replied, sizing him up as Regina approached the table.

She rested her hands on the back of his chair, close to his shoulders. “Everything okay over here?”

Emma smiled, nodding. “Just getting to know Robin a bit more. Right?”
“Yes,” he said, glancing up to find Regina smiling at him. It made his heart skip a beat. “Do you need any help?”

She shook her head. “Everything is under control. So just relax while I go greet everyone. Mingle, get to know the people of Storybrooke.”

“I can introduce you to some people,” Emma offered.

“Thanks, that sounds great.” Robin hoped his disappointment didn’t show. He should’ve known better than to think he would be standing by her side. Still, he hoped he could pull it off somehow.

Regina squeezed his shoulder. “Just keep your eye on Sophie for me. I’ll be back later.”

She walked off, her assistant Ruby sticking close to her with a clipboard. Robin sighed, glancing over to where Sophie and Henry sat at one of the tables reserved for the children. They were laughing over something on his phone, perfectly fine.

A waiter filled a glass of water. “Can I get you anything to start with, sir?” he asked Robin.

Robin shook his head. “Water’s fine for now.”

The man nodded and walked away. Sophie skipped over as Robin took a sip of water, sitting next to him. “When does the fun start?” she asked.

“Soon,” Emma promised, smiling. “Once everyone starts arriving, your mom will welcome everyone and the dancing will start.”

Sophie turned to him. “You’ll dance with me, right, Daddy?”

“Of course,” he said, squeezing her hand. “What kind of date would I be if I didn’t dance with you? I’ll tell you—a bad one.”

“You hear that, Killian?” Emma asked as her boyfriend approached the table.

“Aye, love,” he replied. “And don’t worry. I have every intention of dancing with you, Swan.”

Sophie let out a soft “aww” and Robin chuckled before turning back to her. “Do you want anything to drink?”

“Can I get a Shirley Temple?” she asked, giving him puppy dog eyes.

He bit his lip, wondering if it was something Regina didn’t let her have. But he shrugged. “Fine. Let’s go get it.”

They stood and Sophie slipped her hand into his. He swung their arms as they crossed the ballroom, making her laugh. They approached the bar and the man behind it smiled at them. “What can I get you two?”

“I’ll take a sparkling water and she’ll have a Shirley Temple,” Robin ordered.

He nodded. “Coming right up.”

Sophie watched the bartender make their drinks before looking up at him. “Are you not drinking because you’re driving?”

“Pretty much,” he said, though he had been planning on having one glass of whiskey later. Perhaps it was better he stuck with non-alcoholic beverages for the evening. It wasn’t just him he
was going to be transporting home when the ball was over.

“That’s good,” she replied, taking the glass the bartender handed her. Sophie beamed at the man. “Thank you.”

Robin pulled out his wallet. “How much?”

“Open bar,” the man said, waving his hand. “Enjoy the ball.”

“Thank you.” Robin took Sophie’s hand again and led her back to the table. People were starting to arrive and they greeted the girl warmly. She acknowledged everyone who spoke to her, reminding him of her mother, before introducing him as her father. Many were surprised but gave him a warm welcome.

Regina approached them, looking over their drinks. She raised an eyebrow. “I see someone got her Shirley Temple.”

“I hope you don’t mind me spoiling her a bit tonight,” he said, placing his hand on Sophie’s shoulder.

She sighed. “I guess I can forgive it tonight. It is a special occasion and you haven’t had the chance before. Just don’t go overboard, got it?”

“Of course,” he replied. “I’ll make sure she doesn’t overdo it. Two drink minimum, how’s that?”

“Daddy!” Sophie exclaimed.

Regina, though, nodded. “Sounds reasonable. After that, she drinks water.”

“Agreed,” he said. “Come on, Sophie. Let’s leave your mother to her mayoral duties.”

“I’ll join you two shortly. I promise,” she called out after them. Regina smiled at them both and Robin felt that familiar warmth in his chest again as he led Sophie back to their table.

He was a goner.

Lily arrived about a half hour later, wearing a dark blue dress with spaghetti straps. Her skirt was made of tulle and she looked absolutely miserable. “I hate being girly,” she groused.

“You look pretty, though,” Sophie said and Henry nodded.

She glared at them. “I don’t care.”

“Whatsoever, I have news!” Sophie declared. Lily perked up and leaned closer, as did Henry. “I think my parents are still in love with each other.”

Lily raised her eyebrows and Henry sighed. “Why do I feel another scheme coming on?”

“Because this is Sophie we’re talking about?” Lily replied.

Sophie scowled at them. “I’m being serious, guys. The way they look at each other and smile…I really do think they are still in love and just need a little push to get back together.”

“I think you’ve watched The Parent Trap one too many times,” Lily shot back.
Henry, though, scooted closer to Sophie. “What type of push do you have in mind?”

“Nothing drastic,” she said. “I thought maybe if we were able to maneuver them into a really romantic dance, they’ll look into each other’s eyes and have to admit the feelings that are still there.”

Lily shook her head. “We need to cut you off from the Hallmark Channel. It doesn’t work like that in real life!”

“What do you know?” Henry shot back. “It sounds like a good plan to me. My mom swears by this song ‘Only You.’ Do you want us to request it?”

“No. My mom really loves ‘At Last’ so we’ll use that. But not yet. Let’s let some other dances go by. Maybe after the father-daughter dance?” Sophie suggested.

Henry grinned. “You just want to make sure you dance with your father in case things go south.”

“I do,” she admitted. “But I was also hoping that seeing him and me together would also stir something in Mom.”

“Sneaky. I like it.” Lily smiled like the Grinch after he chose to steal Christmas. It unnerved Sophie a bit but she ignored it.

She leaned closer to her friends. “So are you in?”

“Yeah,” Lily replied. “It could be fun.”

Henry rolled his eyes but nodded. “Just let me know what you need me to do and I’ll do it.”

Grinning, Sophie leaned back. Things were really looking up. She might have two united parents by the end of the summer.

Regina was used to handling social events on her own. Of course Ruby was never too far from her as her assistant, but she always hovered in the background while Regina smiled and chatted with the people.

This year, though, Robin was right by her side. She had made it clear that they weren’t really dates and she didn’t want the townspeople talking, but Robin had still managed to glue himself to her after she had welcomed everyone. He didn’t pull attention from her, just stood there with his hand on her lower back and smiled. Every so often, he answered a question or interjected some thought of his own.

Deep down, she enjoyed having someone to share this with and she marveled at how natural Robin was at being a politician’s husband. Then again, it shouldn’t have surprised her. He was always sociable and had a way of putting people at ease. It was as if he was born to play this role.

She ignored the implications of that thought.

“Regina, I think you should take a break and enjoy your salad,” he whispered, leaning close to her. His body heat and warm breath enveloped her as he placed a hand on the small of her back.

“I’m fine.” She waved him off.

He didn’t back away. “You need to eat, Regina, and get off your feet for a few minutes. Come
She was surprised when he gave her a little push and guided her back to her table. He held out her chair and made sure she sat before taking his own seat, which was right beside hers. Robin then proceeded to watch as she ate, making sure she finished it.

Ruby’s eyes widened. “You…You actually got her to eat. You’re a miracle worker, Robin.”

As she glared at her assistant, Robin chuckled. “It’s not a miracle. I’m not an employee so she can’t fire me. So I can be more forceful with her.”

“Then I’m glad you’re staying. You’ll be a godsend at political events,” Ruby replied.

Regina wiped her mouth. “You’re assuming he’s going to be at them. He’s not my boyfriend.”

Ruby gave her a look of disbelief while Robin suddenly got interested in his empty salad plate. She herself also felt she was lying, but she didn’t want to get her hopes up. Just because Robin was being attentive tonight did not mean he wanted to get back together with her.

“Well,” she said, pushing her plate away, “I’m going to go back to circulating the room. You can stay here, Robin.”

He shook his head, standing. “No, I can go with you. I’m done as well.”

“Robin…” Warning laced his name.

“I’m just meeting my new neighbors,” he told her, flashing his dimples. They were always her downfall and tonight was no different.

She let out an exasperated breath. “Just don’t get in my way.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” He followed her to the next table and she wished her stomach would stop doing somersaults.

“You might not have to do much to get your parents together,” Lily told Sophie. “They seem to be doing fine on their own.”

Sophie glanced over to find her parents standing together at a table, talking with Marco and Dr. Hopper. Robin stood close to her mother, his hand on her back as she leaned against him. It made Sophie smile. “This is great!”

“So are we still going to make sure they dance?” Henry asked.

“Yep,” she replied. “It’ll seal the deal.”

Lily crinkled her nose. “If they start kissing on the dancefloor, I’m out of here. I don’t need to see that.”

“I doubt they’ll do that. My mom isn’t going to want a big spectacle, after all. Not as mayor,” Sophie reasoned.

Henry nodded. “So after the parent-child dance?”

“Yes,” she confirmed, giddy. “This will be great!”
“Well, you better get ready. I heard the bandleader tell the musicians to get ready for the parent-child dance,” Lily said, jerking her thumb toward the bandstand.

Sophie grabbed her friends’ hands and dragged them over to the bandleader. “Excuse me?” she said.

He glanced down at her and smiled. “Can I help you, Miss Mills?”

“I was hoping to make a request.”

“Of course.” He smiled. “What is it?”

She toyed with her dress. “When you’re done with the parent-child dance, can you play ‘At Last’? Please?”

“Well, that’s an odd request for someone so young. Already got a special someone?” He glanced between Lily, Henry and her.

“No. It’s for…Well, it’s for my parents. But don’t tell them that,” she said quickly.

He grinned, glancing over at Regina and Robin before nodding. “I think I can do that. You got it, Miss Mills.”

“Thank you!” She bounced up and down, heading away from the bandstand as the bandleader turned to the microphone.

“Alright, moms and dads, go find your offspring and escort them to the dancefloor. It’s time for the parent-child dance.”

Sophie watched as Robin walked toward her, grinning. He bowed and held out his hand to her. “May I have this dance, milady?”

“Of course you may.” She placed her hand in his and giggled.

Robin led her to the dancefloor and held her close as the music started up. She rested her head against his chest, hearing his heartbeat even over the singer. Closing her eyes, she let him sway her in time to the music.

It was everything she had ever dreamt of when she imagined having a father-daughter. His arms were strong and she felt like they could protect her from everything. Love seemed to radiate off him and he kissed the top of her head. “Love you, Sophie.”

“Love you too, Daddy,” she murmured. “Thanks for being here with me.”

“I’m always going to be here now. I promise you.” He kissed her head again as she smiled in joy.

Regina was not going to cry. She would mess up her makeup and she had vowed to never show tears to her constituents. But damn it if Robin dancing with their daughter wasn’t making her eyes all misty. She ducked her head, wiping at her eyes discreetly as the dance continued.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Ruby approached her, arms crossed. “They make quite a pair.”

“Yes, they do,” Regina replied.

The younger woman looked her up and down. “You know, you and Robin also make quite a
Regina sighed, knowing people were going to get the wrong impression. “We’re not together, Ruby, you know that.”

“I know. But I also know that he really hasn’t left your side and he got you to actually eat something. You two look like you’re married. So why not date him?”

“You don’t know the history between us, Rubes.”

“The fact your mother interfered and kept you two apart despite you being pregnant with his child?” Ruby asked.

Regina’s eyes widened as she turned to her assistant. “Who told you about that?”

“Small town, everyone knows everything.” Ruby shrugged.

She sighed. “Of course. How silly of me to think I would have any semblance of privacy.”

“It is kinda big news,” Ruby tried to argue before sighing. “Look, I know it sucks. But really, why not give Robin a chance? He looks at you like you hung the moon, you know.”

It sounded like the same thing Granny had told her that afternoon and so she gave Ruby the side eye. “Did your grandmother put you up to this?”

“What? Why would she do that?” Ruby looked genuinely confused so Regina let it drop.

Instead, she looked back Robin and Sophie as the song started to come to an end. Panic seized her. “Do you have my phone?” she asked. “I want to get a picture before the moment passes.”

Ruby pulled the device out of her purse and handed it to Regina. “Go ahead. It’s going to be a great shot.”

She took her phone and hurried over, getting a few pictures of Robin and Sophie. Her daughter’s eyes were closed as Robin was now just hugging her close to him, swaying them gently in time to the music. They looked so peaceful, so sweet.

The music ended and she stopped them before they could separate. She held up her phone. “I want one picture of you two smiling into the camera.”

“Mom!” Sophie protested.

Robin chuckled though. “Let’s give your mother what she wants, okay?”

She sighed but took her father’s hand to pretend like they were still dancing. Both of them smiled at Regina’s phone and she took a few pictures. “There we go,” she said.

“Can I change one Mills girl for another?” He held out his hand to her. “Dance with me, Regina?”

Regina stared at his hand, her mind trying to come up with a reason why she shouldn’t. But her daughter pushed her closer, saying: “Go ahead, Mom. Dance with Daddy.”

“Okay. One dance,” she stressed, taking his hand as she handed her phone to her daughter.

Sophie held it up. “Smile!”

“Oh no you don’t,” Regina warned her daughter.
“It’s only fair.” Robin grinned at her and she felt annoyance creep up. Of course he would side with Sophie.

She sighed, noting the other parents were finishing their pictures. “You win. But make it quick. The music will start up again soon.”

Robin wrapped his arm around her waist before taking her left hand in his right. There was still a respectable amount of space between them as they smiled at their daughter, who took the picture. She gave them a thumbs’ up before saying: “I hope you like the song!”

Sophie left before Regina could ask her what she meant. The bandleader said someone had requested the song they were about to play and the opening chords filled the air, causing her heart to stop for a moment.

They were playing “At Last.”

The band was playing their song.

Robin and Regina stood there as other couples began to dance around them, staring at each other. His heart hammered in his chest as three thoughts crossed his mind. First, Sophie was a dangerous mix of the two of them—clever, sly and well-meaning—as it was clear she had arranged for this song to be played. She probably had planned to get them to dance together when he unknowingly stepped into her trap.

Second, Sophie knew this was their song. No, he amended, she knew this song was important to Regina though probably not why. It warmed him to know she still listened to it even after how everything ended between them.

The third thing he then realized was Regina’s deer in the headlights look. She had told him back then about her mother and how Cora Mills controlled nearly every aspect of her life. How that summer was her first taste of freedom, of being able to make her own choices. Now, though, Robin really understood how far Cora would go for her vision of what Regina’s life should’ve been. So he also understood the look in her eyes now—the one that told him she was wondering if he was manipulating her now through their daughter.

“Regina,” he said, voice loud enough for only her to hear over the music. “I had nothing to do with this. I wanted a dance but I didn’t ask them to play this song. Nor did I ask Sophie to request it.”

She nodded slowly. “Okay. I believe you.”

“Do you want to sit this song out? Dance another time?” he offered.

“No, no,” she replied. “This is fine. I can do it. It’s just a song, right?”

Regina was trying to put on a brave face but he saw through her mask. He always had. “We don’t have to…”

“It’s fine. I’m fine.” She stepped closer, urging him to start moving. He tightened his grip on her waist and started to sway with her.

After a few measures, Regina leaned against him and rested her head on his shoulder. He pressed his cheek to her hair and closed his eyes, letting the music take him back eleven years. The
ballroom melted away until he was back on a beach, dancing by a bonfire to a portable CD player. That had been the night they finally admitted that what lay between them was already more than friendship. Robin remembered inching closer to her, giving her plenty of time to stop him, before capturing her lips with his for their first kiss. He felt like a man who had been traveling through the desert and she was a well filled with sweet, refreshing water.

When they broke for air, Robin had turned on the CD player and that had been the first song to play. It seemed appropriate, so he stood and held his hand out to her. She had taken it without a word, letting him hold her close as they danced to the song. An unspoken agreement passed through them—it was now their song.

As the years went on, he refused to dance with anyone else to that song. It belonged to him and Regina alone. So he would just sit out, sipping his drink if it was alcoholic and reminisce for a few minutes.

Marian had hated it.

The song ended too soon for his liking and he opened his eyes, back in the ballroom. He still held Regina close, her hand gripping his jacket. Something dampened his shirt, making him realize she was crying. “Regina?” he asked softly.

She lifted her head, eyes shining with her tears. Her lips parted as if she was going to say something. Instead, though, she let go of him and fled the dance floor.

It took only a few seconds for his mind to catch up and then he was chasing after her.

Regina opened the doors to the balcony, letting the cool night air hit her heated face. Tears made her cheeks sticky and she brushed them away. She had thought she could handle that one dance. How wrong she had been.

Wrapped up in his arms, with that song playing, she had been transported back the beach where she had fallen in love with him. It was like the last eleven years hadn’t happened. She was warm, safe and loved.

It wasn’t fair. She couldn’t have that. Why subject herself to more torture then? Just stop everything before her heart could hope to have him again like that in her life.

“Regina?” Robin’s soft voice sent another pang of pain through her heart.

She closed her eyes and cursed him. “Can’t I have a moment’s peace without you hovering?”

“You’re upset,” he said. “So no.”

Regina spun to face him, finding him standing there with a pack of tissues in his hand. She resisted the urge to grab them as she snapped: “It’s not your job to take care of me.”

“I know. I want to, Regina. Not out of obligation but because I do care for you.” He bit his lip before throwing up his hands. “Oh, hell, I’m still in love with you.”

Her heart beat faster at his proclamation. “I never stopped loving you either.”

Robin nodded. “So, where do we go from here?”
“Where can we go?” she asked, hugging herself. “We can’t just pick up where we left off eleven years ago.”

“Of course not. We’ve both done a lot of living since then.” He motioned to the bench near them, helping her sit down.

She arranged her skirts before folding her hands in her lap, staring at them so as not to meet his eyes. “Do you think a relationship can work? Even with everything that happened?”

“I do.” He tilted her chin up, turning her head to meet his eyes. Hope and love shone in them. “Yes, what happened to us was awful. We were torn apart without a chance to really fight for our relationship. But I’m going to fight for it now. Let’s try again.”

Regina looked into his eyes, still unchanged in many ways from eleven years ago but holding more wisdom now. Was their history really a mountain between them? Or did she imagine it so in order to protect her heart? And was it fair for her to hide from love just because there might be pain?

No, it wasn’t. She realized that she wasn’t being fair to herself, keeping herself from life experiences just because she was scared. Because she had been hurt before and didn’t want to get hurt again. That was no way to live her life.

“Okay,” she said softly.

He smiled, eyes shining. “Okay? You’ll give us a second chance?”

She nodded and he cupped her cheek, brushing it with his thumb. “Then can I take you out Tuesday night for a proper date?”

“Tuesday sounds perfect.” She leaned forward, kissing him at last. It was sweet and chaste, nothing like the passionate kisses they had exchanged all those years ago. But it still awakened a fire and yearning in her.

He broke the kiss, bumping his nose with hers. “Shall we head back inside? Or do you need a moment?”

She shook her head. “I’m fine. Let’s go back in.”

“THEY’RE KISSING!” Sophie shook Henry as they stood at the windows with Lily, spying on Regina and Robin.

Henry pulled away from his friend. “I can see. Looks like your plan worked, Soph. Congrats.”

“Well, it didn’t look like Aunt Regina and Robin needed much of a push,” Lily commented. “He did a lot of the work for us.”

“Still, my parents kissed! That’s a step in the right direction.” Sophie skipped away from the window, smiling.

The door opened and the three were busted, staring up at the two smiling adults. Robin raised his eyebrow. “Were you spying on us?”

“Yes,” Lily replied as Henry and Sophie gaped at her. She glanced at her friends and shrugged. “Why bother lying in this case?”
“You are such your mother’s daughter.” Regina shook her head. “Lily, Henry, can you give us a few moments with our daughter?”

They nodded, heading back over to their own mothers. Sophie glanced between her parents. “Well?”

Robin knelt down to be eye level with her and rubbed her arms. “Would you mind if I took your mother out on a date this Tuesday?”

She shook her head before hugging him. “Just make sure to take her out some place really, really nice. She deserves it,” she whispered to him.

“I will,” he whispered back. He stood, holding her close to him as he pulled Regina against him as well. “Well, ladies, shall we see if I can dance with both Mills’ women at the same time?”

“I would love to see that,” Regina replied, smiling brighter than Sophie had ever seen.

Robin led them out to the dance floor as a slow song played. It made it easy for him to dance with them both. Sophie wrapped her arm around his middle, pressing her cheek against his chest, while her mother laid her head on his shoulder. She rested her hand over his heart, though, and he pressed kisses into her hairline as one hand kept a sure grip on Sophie.

A giddy feeling grew inside Sophie as the dance continued and she smiled, enjoying the feeling of the three of them together at last.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the next part! I hope the Outlaw Queen goodness at the end makes up for the wait!

Looks like Sophie has some adjusting to do that she wasn’t expecting. They all do, but they’ll get there.

And I hope you all hang on for the ride!

--Mac
Chapter 7: Family Moments

Regina and Sophie slept in the day after the ball, not waking up until lunch time. They sat at the kitchen table in their pajamas, Regina sipping at her coffee as she stared at her zombie-like daughter before suggesting: "Granny's?"

"Granny's," Sophie agreed before yawning. "Can we go in our pajamas? Please?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not. If you want to lay about in our pajamas, we can have the food delivered."

"Really? You're the best, Mom!" Sophie jumped up, hugging her. "I'll go get the menu from the kitchen!"

As Sophie ran into the next room, Regina pulled out her phone. She smiled to see there was a text message from Robin waiting for her and she swiped the screen to read it.

Good morning to my favorite ladies, though I hope you two got more sleep than I did. I'm off to pick up Roland. Perhaps we can pick up some lunch and eat with you and Sophie?

Sophie bounded into the room, waving Granny's menu. "Do you think milkshakes will make it here?"

"If the air conditioning is cranked up all the way, I'm sure," Regina replied, patting the chair next to her. "But what if Daddy picks it up and brings it here? Then all four of us can have lunch together?"

Her daughter lit up and her smile was radiant. "Really? That sounds wonderful! Have you spoken with him?"

"Not yet. Why don't we call him together?" Regina hit Robin's name and then turned on the speakerphone on her cell phone.

After a few rings, Robin's voice came over the speaker: "Hello, lovely."

"Hi, Daddy!" Sophie exclaimed, leaning closer to the phone.

Robin paused for a moment before chuckling. "Let me correct myself. Hello, lovelies. Did my Mills' girls sleep well?"

"We both slept like logs," Regina replied wryly. "How about you?"

"I'm amazed I made it to bed and didn't just fall asleep on the couch," he said before it sounded like the phone got jostled. "Sorry, I'm outside the rec center and the place is swarming with parents. I can't move an inch either way."

Regina nodded, recalling all the times she picked Sophie up and had contemplated using mayoral privilege to sneak in through the back. "Well, Sophie and I are accepting your offer to pick up lunch and then come eat with us."

"Great! I'm sure Roland will be thrilled and will want to tell you both all about his night," Robin replied. "Text me your orders and I'll let you know when we're on our way over."
"Will do. Can't wait to see you," Regina said, smiling at Sophie.

The girl leaned over. "Bye, Daddy! I love you."

Regina disconnected the call and then texted Robin their orders. She smiled at Sophie. "Let's go set the living room up for a picnic. How's that?"

Sophie cheered, running off to the living room. Regina followed at a slower pace, eager to see Robin again herself. Everything seemed freer now that they had admitted to their lingering feeling and had decided to try again. They could be themselves around each other and their children with no awkward tension between.

It was amazing.

Robin sat with his back against Regina's couch, watching as Roland regaled Sophie and Regina with stories about his night at the rec center. They gave him their undivided attention, Sophie cuddled against Robin's side. He wrapped his arm around her, rubbing her arm lazily.

"And then we watched a movie on a REALLY big screen," Roland explained, holding out his arms to show how big the screen was.

"That is a big screen," Regina replied. "What movie did you watch?"

"Finding Nemo. It was really good but a little scary. I had to hide in my blanket cause Papa wasn't there," Roland glanced at him, phantom fear in his big brown eyes.

Robin leaned over and pulled him into his arms. "I'm sorry I wasn't there, but you were fine, right? The rest of the movie wasn't scary?"

"No. It was funny. I really liked Dory! Just keep swimming, just keep swimming," he sang, bouncing against Robin's legs.

Everyone chuckled and Sophie grinned. "Maybe we could go see Finding Dory then? Today?"

Roland gasped and he looked up at Robin. "There's another movie? Can we see it? Please, please, please?"

Unable to resist those puppy dog eyes (and his daughter's), Robin melted. "Alright. We can go to the movies…if it's okay with Ms. Regina."

"It's okay with me," she said, laughing as she picked up her phone. "Let's check the movie times."

"While we do that, why don't you and Sophie go upstairs and get dressed?" He tapped Roland's back, sending the boy and his sister running from the room.

Regina moved closer to him, eyebrow raised. "We don't know when the movie is playing. Why make them change?"

He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close to him. "I wanted some alone time with you, lovely."

"It's been so long since I've been called that." She closed her eyes and he wondered if she was back on the beach again, like he had been in his dreams the night before. "I've missed it."

"I've missed you." He leaned forward, kissing her. They had shared a good night kiss when he
had dropped her and Sophie back at home after the ball, but it had been a quick peck that had left him wanting more. Now, he was able to get it.

Regina deepened the kiss, wrapping her arms around his neck as his hands gripped her hips. Kissing her was everything he had remembered it to be and the same fire lit in him back then was rekindled now. He had missed its warmth inside of him.

She broke the kiss, laying her hand against his cheek. "We should probably check for movie times. Our children can't spend forever changing."

His heart leapt when she said "our children" but he sighed when he realized she was right. So he reached for his cell phone. "Good point."

As he scrolled the movie times, Roland and Sophie returned to the room. They sat down again, giggling. "Are we leaving now?" she asked.

"We have a little time," Robin replied, looking at the times. "Next movie isn't for another hour."

"Can we play a game?" Roland asked, sliding onto Regina's lap.

She smiled and nodded. "I think we have time for a quick game."

Sophie held her father's hand as they walked through the theater lobby toward the concession stand. Her mother was a few steps behind her, clutching Roland's hand as he chattered about the last time he had seen a movie in the theater.

"What will it be, sweetheart?" Robin asked as they approached the counter.

"Can I get a small popcorn and a small soda?" She glanced up at him with her best puppy dog eyes.

He, though, looked back at her mother and so Sophie turned her pleading eyes to Regina as well. When she sighed, Sophie knew to count a victory. "Okay. But make it a kiddie soda. Even the small is too much here," she said.

"Alright. One small popcorn and one kiddie soda it is," Robin said, wrapping his arm around Sophie as he urged her closer to the counter.

The young man behind the counter smiled at them and quickly filled their order. Sophie watched as her mother pulled out her wallet but Robin shook his head. "I've got it. This is my treat."

"Robin…" She started.

He smiled, covering her hand with his. "You can pay for the next outing. I promise."

"Fine," she said, putting her wallet away. "But I'm going to hold you to that."

"I expect you to." Robin smirked as he paid for their snacks. It lifted Sophie's spirits even more to know that they were planning more family outings like this together.

He gathered everything up and motioned with his head for them to head to the theater. Sophie fell into step with her brother and mother, who wrapped her arm around Sophie's shoulders and held her close. Leaning into it, Sophie thought they looked very much like a family.

They found seats in the middle of the theater and settled down. Sophie sat between her parents
while Roland plopped himself on their father's lap rather than sit in a booster. Robin held him close and let him share his popcorn.

He then leaned down and smiled at Sophie. "How are you doing, Princess?"

"I'm good," she said. Robin nodded and kissed her head before sitting up.

The lights began to dim and Sophie made herself more comfortable as she prepared for the movie to begin.

"Wine?" Regina held out a glass to Robin as he relaxed on her couch after what had ended being a busy day. The movie outing had then expanded to include a visit to Storybrooke's only miniature golf course and trip to Any Given Sundae for ice cream. It ended with them picking up a pizza pie and coming back to Regina's to eat as the sun began to set.

He smiled, taking the glass from her as he sat up from his reclining position. "Thank you very much."

She plopped down next to him, curling against his side as she tucked her feet under her. "Sophie is in her room reading and Roland is asleep in the guest room. It's just us."

"I like the sound of that," he replied, wrapping his arm around her. He tapped his glass against hers. "To peace and quiet."

"I'll drink to that." She took a sip as she leaned against him, closing her eyes. "This is nice."

He hummed in agreement, kissing the side of her head. As he did so, he clamped down on the anger rising against Cora Mills yet again. This was something they could've had had she not denied their relationship a chance to thrive. But he had it now and that was what he needed to focus on. He was going to let his anger ruin his second chance.

"I am so glad the Summer Festival is over. I feel like I can think now." She set down her wine glass and curled against him.

"Good," he said, rubbing her arms. "I want you all to myself on Tuesday when we go out on our date."

She smiled up at him. "Are you as excited about it as I am?"

He chuckled. "Yes. Though it's been awhile. I hope I'm not out of practice."

"It probably hasn't been as long as it has been for me," she said sighing. "If anyone is out of practice, it's definitely me."

Robin frowned. While he wasn't thrilled thinking about her potentially dating anyone else, he still found it odd that she hadn't had a significant romantic relationship since him. Someone had to have recognized what an amazing woman she was. "I know it's none of my business, but when was your last date?" he asked, hoping he wasn't going too far.

She sighed, sitting up. "I had a date about a year ago that ended in disaster. We had nothing in common and he seemed repulsed by the fact I had a daughter. Emma called and bailed me out of that one. So I don't really count that. I guess the last time I had anything resembling romance, it was a relationship with Sidney Glass, the newspaper editor, but that fizzled out as well. So, my love life really hasn't been so hot."
"The men in this town are morons," Robin said, taking his hand. "But I must admit, I'm grateful for that for it gives us our second chance."

"Yes, it does," she replied, sliding closer to him. She squeezed his thigh and he swallowed, his body reacting to her touch.

Robin tucked her hair behind her ear, pressing his forehead to hers. "Can I kiss you?"

She answered by kissing him. He cupped the back of her head as she grabbed onto his shirt, pulling him until they were lying on the couch. Robin adjusted so they were more comfortable and slid one of his hands under her shirt, feeling her warm, soft skin.

Regina moaned, spurring him to deepen the kiss as he swept her mouth with his tongue. Her fingers dug in his scalp, tugging gently at his hair as she bent one of her knees until Robin fit between her legs. She bucked a bit, sending a jolt through him and he bit back his own moan.

He trailed kisses down her neck as they continued to writhe against each other. Robin's head span as her vanilla scent assaulted his senses and he started to fiddle with her bra clasp, wanting more and more of her.

"Eww," Sophie said, slamming Robin back into reality. He lifted his head from Regina's neck to find their daughter standing there, looking absolutely disgusted.

"Sophie!" Regina sat up, pushing him off to do so. She tucked her hair behind her ears, which were turning pink. "What do you need, sweetheart?"

"I was hoping Daddy could tuck me in." Sophie glanced up at Robin, askance in her eyes.

He smiled, nodding. "Of course, sweetheart. Why don't you head upstairs? I'll be up in a minute."

"Okay," she said, leaning over to hug her mother. She gave Regina a kiss on the cheek. "Good night, Mom."

"Good night, sweetheart." Regina hugged Sophie before sending the girl upstairs.

She fell back against the couch once they were alone and covered her eyes with her eyes. "We just got caught making out by our daughter."

He nodded. "Yeah. Not our finest moment."

They glanced at each other before dissolving into giggles. Regina fell against him, resting her head on his shoulder. "She's probably going to regret setting us up now."

"Nah," he replied. "I think she's thrilled we're together. I know I am."

Regina smiled up at him, her eyes glowing with affection. "Me too."

He kissed her before standing. "Okay, I think more than a minute has passed. I should head up before she starts to get ideas about what we're doing."

Climbing the stairs, Robin knocked on Sophie's partially open door. "Can I come in?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. She was sitting up in bed, her blankets gathered at the foot of her bed. Applesauce sat on one side of her and her Teddy bear was propped up on the other. She smiled up at him. "I know I'm a bit too old for this but..."

"We have a lot to make up for," Robin said, understanding. "Don't worry. I'll tuck you in and
even read you a bedtime story if you want."

She gave him a look that was so much her mother, Robin's heart skipped a beat. "Daddy."

"Okay, okay. I'll just tuck you in and give you a kiss on your forehead." He did just that before leaning down to look her in the eyes. "Then wish you pleasant dreams and tell you I'll see you in the morning. So have pleasant dreams, Princess, and I'll see you in the morning."

"I love you, Daddy," Sophie said, her eyes already fluttering closed.

He smiled, smoothing down her hair. "I love you too, Princess. Good night."

Robin sat down on the edge of the bed and kept running his hand through her hair as she drifted off to sleep. He watched her with a goofy smile, still amazed that he had had a part in creating her. And he wished he had more memories like this with her.

"She's not going anywhere," Regina said softly, leaning against the door with her arms crossed. She smiled down at their daughter.

"I know," he replied, the anger simmering again. "But I didn't get this. I didn't get to just sit and watch her when she was a baby. I didn't get to hold her when she had a nightmare or take care of her when she was sick. There's just so much…"

Regina pulled him close to her, letting him rest against her stomach as she combed her fingers through his hair. "I know. And I know it won't be the same…but I have a lot of pictures and videos of Sophie's life so far. You can see them whenever you want."

"Thank you," he whispered, swallowing the anger down again. She was doing her best with this situation and he was grateful for her support. He took her hand as she helped him up. They left Sophie's room together, closing the door behind them.

He paused in the hallway. "So, which room is mine?"

"Come on. I'll show you," she replied, smiling as she led him down the hallway. Robin followed her as she reached a door at the very end and before she pushed it open, he knew it was the master bedroom.

Her room.

Robin dug his heels in, hesitant. "Regina, are you sure? I can sleep elsewhere. You don't…We don't have to rush anything."

Despite their make out session on the couch, Robin did want to take things slow with her. He knew they couldn't just pick up where they left off eleven years prior and didn't want to flame out because they moved too fast to adjust to how their lives had changed. Sex seemed to fall into the "too much, too soon" category.

"I'm not suggesting that," she said, taking his hands. "I just don't see why we can't share a bed. I trust you not to do anything we're not ready for."

"I have the same trust in you." He hugged her. "I just…I just don't want to screw this up. This is our second chance and I want to make it last the rest of our lives."

She chuckled. "While I appreciate the sentiment, I don't think we're going to screw it up by sharing a bed to sleep. Just sleep."
He let out a soft chuckle of his own. "Well, I guess when you put it that way…"

"Come on." She pulled away, smiling at him. "It's getting late."

Robin followed her to bed, watching as she turned down the covers. She pointed to a door on the other side of the room. "That leads to the bathroom if you want to get changed in there."

"Thanks," he replied, heading toward the bathroom. "I'll be right out."

Once they both had finished getting ready for bed, they climbed in together. Regina's bed was soft and it felt like he was resting on a cloud. "Oh, you must tell me where you got this mattress," he sighed, sinking into it.

She chuckled. "I'll take you shopping to all my stores. Promise."

"Good." He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss. "Goodnight, Regina."

"Goodnight, Robin." She gave him a small smile before turning off the lights, plunging the room into darkness.

As if drawn together, they curled up together. Robin wrapped his arms around her as she rested her head on his chest. They both sighed in contentment before drifting off to sleep together.

Regina woke a few hours later though she wasn't sure why. She had rolled away from Robin in the night, now facing away from him, and he had done the same for she felt his back against hers. As she sat up to reposition herself against him again, a bolt of lightning illuminated the room and was followed by a loud thunder clap. Her heart leaped into her throat and she pressed her hand to her chest, trying to calm herself down. She was a grown woman and thunderstorms couldn't hurt her, she reminded herself. She was safe.

She was about to settle back down when she heard it—crying. Regina pushed back the blankets, her feet hitting the floor as she jumped up. Sophie had always been a sound sleeper and never one to jump during a storm, so Regina doubted it was her daughter. Which left only one option—Roland.

Opening the door to the room she had given the boy, she flipped on the lights to find him sitting up in bed. He was holding his knees close to his chest, rocking back and forth as he cried. When another clap of thunder rattled his windows, he buried his head in his arms and sobbed louder.

"Roland," she said, sitting down on the edge of his bed and running her fingers through his curls. "It's okay, sweetheart."

"It's loud." He lifted his head to reveal tearstained cheeks.

Regina brushed some tears away. "I know. The thunder scares me too."

His eyes widened. "It does?"

"Oh, yes. Do you want to come with me and we can protect each other from the thunder?"

Roland launched himself at her, wrapping his small body around her. He was still trembling as she carried him back to her room. She didn't know when his mother left his life and wondered if he was lacking for a mother's touch despite how much Robin loved and doted on the boy.

There was still so much about the eleven years Robin hadn't shared yet.
When she entered her room, Robin was still asleep. He was sprawled out on his back, his arm now outstretched on her side of the bed. She smiled at the sight before putting Roland down. He scooted closer to his father, who woke with a start. "Roland?"

"There's a storm," Roland explained, clutching his Teddy bear close. "Regina said we can protect each other since she gets scared of storms too."

"Ahh, yes, I do remember that," Robin said, glancing up at her. She remembered a few storms spent wrapped up in his arms as they laid together in bed, waiting for the storms to pass.

Regina climbed into bed. "Maybe Papa can protect both of us from the scary thunder while we snuggle?"

"Oh, that's the perfect job for me, right, Roland?" Robin nudged his son, who nodded excitedly.

"Then it's settled," she replied, curling around the young boy. He rested his head in the crook of her neck, dark curls tickling her chin as Robin wrapped his arm around the two of them. He held them close as they fell back asleep together.

When she next woke, Regina found Roland still tucked against her side. He was awake, though, and watching as Robin chatted with Sophie. She was still in her pajamas and kneeling next to her father on the bed. Her brown eyes were shining as she looked up at him with complete adoration, basking in his undivided attention.

An ache filled Regina's heart and she finally understood Robin's indignant rage at her mother. Cora hadn't just kept Robin from being a father to Sophie, she finally realized. She had kept them from being a proper family. These precious moments had been stolen from all of them, taken by someone who had no right to do so.

She was filled at rage at her mother but she swallowed it down as Roland looked up at her, grinning happily as he wished her a good morning. Those moments had been stolen from her but she wasn't going to miss these due to her anger. It wouldn't help her at all.

Robin pulled into Regina's driveway and turned the car off. He hummed as he picked up the bouquet of yellow roses resting in his passenger seat before he climbed out of the car. There was a bounce in his steps as he approached her door…until he saw who was waiting on her front steps for him.

"Well, you brought her flowers. And her favorite ones at that," Mal remarked wryly. "That's a start."

He sighed. "I take it you and Emma are out here to interrogate me? Threaten me?"

"I am," Mal said. "Emma here is willing to give you a chance. Me? I'm not the forgiving sort."

He bit back his retort, knowing it would not help his case. Instead, he asked: "What do you want to know then?"

"I don't want to know anything," she replied. "I want you to know something. I remember how broken Regina was when she met you. She's put herself back together and I'd hate to see all her hard work go to waste."

"Understood," he said, clutching the bouquet tighter. He had no plans to break Regina's heart again.
Mal scowled at him. "I doubt you do."

Robin gritted his teeth. These were Regina's best friends and he wanted to get along with them. He didn't want anything to ruin his second chance with her, but he wasn't going to stand there and be treated like a criminal.

"No, I doubt you understand," he said, voice low and almost in a growl. "I know it's easy to see me as the bad guy in what happened over a decade ago, but I'm not. Yes, there are a thousand things I could've done differently and there are a thousand things Regina could've done differently. But it doesn't change the fact that I drove away from Storybrooke just as heartbroken as she. I had to put myself together again as well. Regina's not the only one with her heart on the line. Mine, Sophie's and Roland's are this time as well. I appreciate the gravity of the situation and I want this to work. I want the four of us to be a family, to spend the rest of our lives together. I love Regina. I always have and I always will."

Mal stepped closer. "More pretty words."

"Mal!" Regina hurried down the stairs, frowning as she approached them. "Back. Off."

"Regina, I don't want to see you get hurt," she replied, crossing her arms. "I don't think you should go down this path."

Regina stood toe-to-toe with her friend, arms crossed. "I know. You've made that quite clear. But Robin's right. He's as much as a victim in this as me. And he wants this to work as much as I do."

"You really believe that bullshit?" Mal sounded incredulous.

"Yes. Because it's not bullshit. You know my mother was a master manipulator. She played both of us. And if you want, I'll prove it to you another day. For now, I'm going on a date with Robin."

When Mal didn't look like she was going to back down, he watched as Regina's stance softened and she lowered her voice. "Look, Mal, I've appreciated your friendship and support all these years. I would love for you to support me now. Please?"

"Alright," Mal replied, though she gave Robin the evil eye. "But I get to kill him if he hurts you."

"No."

"Maim him?" At Regina's glare, she sighed. "Can I at least hurt him? Nothing too bad."

Regina just turned to Emma, arms still crossed. "And why are you out here?"

Emma held up her hands. "I'm just here to find out what Robin's plans are for the evening so I know where to reach you in case of an emergency."

"Right," Robin said, stepping forward. "We have reservations at Bella Notte and then it's lady's choice after."

"Just call me on my cell if you need to reach us, okay?" Regina sighed before turning to face him.

Robin finally was able to take her all in and his mouth went dry. She wore a black cocktail dress with mesh covering her shoulders and neckline, almost making it look like she was wearing a strapless dress. A gold choker was wrapped around her neck, matching the earrings dangling from her earlobes. She held a black clutch in her hands and she wore black stilettos, boosting her height. Her dark hair was swept up into a French twist, leaving her neck bared for him later. Robin was also convinced he was going to be wearing some of her bright red lipstick by the time
he returned her home.

"You look absolutely beautiful," he said, holding out he bouquet of yellow roses to her. "For you."

She smiled, taking the flowers from him before kissing him. He wrapped an arm around her, fingers splayed against her back as he relished having her close to him. Bumping noses with her, Regina's eyes fluttered open. "Hi."

"Hi," he replied. "I hope you don't mind, but there's another beautiful woman I need to hug."

Nodding, Regina stepped aside to reveal Sophie. She was dressed in a red tank top and black capris, her dark hair braided in two plaits. He held open his arms and she rushed into his embrace. "Daddy!"

"Hey there, sweetheart." Robin held her close, kissing the top of her head and noticing her hair was wet. "Did you have a good day?"

She nodded. "Aunt Emma took us to the pool so we could go swimming. Henry and I had a race. I won."

"That's my girl." He squeezed her as she laughed. "Now, you're going to be a good girl for your Aunt Emma, right?"

"I believe that's my line." Regina stepped forward, trying to look stern. She failed, though, and kissed Sophie's forehead. "What your father said."

Sophie nodded, holding out her hand. "Do you want me to take your roses and put them in water?"

"Could you please? Thank you, sweetheart." Regina handed the roses to Sophie.

Robin kissed her forehead. "We'll see you tonight, Sophie. I promise to come in and say goodnight to you."

She beamed before stepping back to stand next to Emma. "Have a good time, you two!"

"We will," Regina said as Robin opened his car door for her. She kissed his cheek before climbing in.

With one last wave to Sophie, he climbed into the car as well and smiled at Regina. "Well, milady, are you ready?"

"Absolutely," she said, leaning back in her seat. She gave a soft smile that transported him back eleven years. For a moment, he was back in the clunker he and Will had saved up to buy together. Her hair was down, tumbling around her shoulders, and she wore a lavender sundress with a white shawl wrapped around her. Robin had put on his only good white button down shirt and his khakis, wanting to look good for their first date.

"Robin?" Regina's voice brought him back to the present. She reached out and laid a hand on his cheek. "You okay?"

He smiled, nodding. "Just lost in the past for a moment. Remember our first date?"

She laughed. "I thought that car was going to fall apart on us."
"I'm surprised it didn't," he said, putting the car in reverse to back down her driveway. "It actually lasted us two more years after that. By then I had my camps up and running, so I could finally afford something better."

"What about Will?"

"We still shared," he admitted. "Until he got his animal care center running. Then he could afford his own."

She smiled. "I'm glad you two had each other. You were always thick as thieves."

"Funny thing is we hated each other back in England. But when we got here, I think we both reminded each other of home and so we banded together." Robin smiled as he remembered the grudging friendship that had blossomed into true brotherhood.

"Will is a good friend," she replied. "I hope he and I can be good friends again. Like we all were that summer."

Robin smiled. "I think Will would like that too. I'm sure we'll get there now that I'm moving here."

She nodded. "I'm going to enjoy having you all in my life. And I'm sure Mal will come around."

"I'm going to enjoy being in your life and not even Mal is going to stop that," he replied, coming to a stop sign. "I'm also going to enjoy it when I know my way around town. Bella Notte is…?"

"Make a left and then go up a few lights. You make a right onto Sycamore and then a quick left onto Oak and it'll take you right to the parking lot so you don't have to try to make a left off Main Street," Regina said, motioning with her hands.

He did as she said, grateful to have her with him. "You're better than a GPS."

"You'll find your way around soon enough," she promised him. "Soon you'll be a Storybrooke pro."

"I can't wait." He smiled at her before following the rest of her directions to the restaurant for their first official date.

The sand was cool and squishy between her toes as she stepped out onto the beach. A soft sea breeze toyed with her hair and she took a deep breath, inhaling the aroma of the ocean. The water was dark but she could hear the waves as they rolled in under the starlit sky. It was beautiful, peaceful and decidedly romantic.

Robin wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close to his warm body. She reached up, closing her hand around his arm as they stared out at the horizon. "I love the ocean," she whispered.

"I remember," he whispered back. "We spent many days and nights on that beach."

She chuckled as flashes of a thin layer of sand coating a shower stall came to mind. "I was cleaning sand out of places I didn't know I had that night we decided to have sex in the surf."

"Yeah, maybe not our best decision." He chuckled, kissing her cheek.

Regina closed her eyes, relishing being in his arms again and having him so close. "I still enjoyed every moment I spent with you that summer. I've always played them over in my mind over the past decade whenever I got lonely or missed you too much."
He was silent for a few moments. "I missed you too. There were a few times I almost got in the car, determined to drive back here to Storybrooke and beg you to take me back. My pride always stopped me and now I wish it hadn't. I could've been in Sophie's life so much sooner."

"Maybe," Regina conceded. "But my mother might have still tried to interfere, to keep us apart. She might have ruined any reconciliation we could've had. We might not have had a chance at this."

When she could still feel his hesitation, she pressed on: "Besides, you wouldn't have Roland. I know you wouldn't want that."

"I love my son and wouldn't change his existence for anything." He kissed where her shoulder met her neck. "I guess it's all about timing."

He chuckled before growing serious again. "Speaking of timing, I've been wondering…When did you conceive Sophie?"

"I was wondering when you were going to ask that." She turned in his arms to look him in the eyes. "Do you remember the weekend the carnival was in town?"

Their small group of friends had made plans to go together one night and she had been looking forward to it. She had fantasies of Robin winning her something at one of the games as well as making out with him in the Tunnel of Love. There was also hopes for a romantic moment high atop the Ferris wheel as well.

Her dreams were all dashed when her boss dropped a mountain of paperwork on her desk and insisted it be completed before the morning. She had been forced to call Kathryn and tell her friends to go without her, knowing she was in for a late night.

By the time she returned to the complex, all Regina wanted to do was take a long shower and go to bed. She then found Robin waiting for her on one of the lounge chairs, two bottles of beer next to him. He held one out to her and she took it, curling up with him as he explained that he wasn't going to let her stay home by herself. It had warmed her heart.

As they nursed their beers, Robin suggested that they relax in the hot tub for a bit. When she commented that it meant going up to her apartment to change, he pointed out that everyone at the complex was at the carnival so no one would know if they had used the hot tub naked.

There were times she wished she could say the beer had gone to her head and that's why she agreed but she knew it wasn't so. She knew the idea of being naked in a hot tub with Robin Locksley excited her in a way that would've scandalized her mother and made her feel alive. And so they had peeled off their clothing before Robin started the hot tub, helping her in.

For the first half hour or so, they had just sat there drinking their beer. Robin rested his arm around her, tracing lazy patterns on the skin of her arm with his fingers. Slowly, they became caresses and Regina began trailing kisses up and down his neck. It didn't take much longer before she was straddling him and riding him in the tub as they took full advantage of being the only ones in the complex. Their cries of pleasure echoed around them as Robin exploded inside her. She hadn't thought much of it at the time, more eager to drag him back to her room for a repeat performance.

Now, standing on a different beach, he nodded. "I'm glad it was that night and not that quickie we had in your coworker's bathroom at that barbeque."

Flashes of being shoved against a door with her legs wrapped around Robin's waist and his lips against her neck crossed her mind. She nodded. "We were very horny that summer, weren't we?"
"We were," he agreed. The amusement in his eyes turned into adoration. "I think, though, that we've proven our connection was so much more than just physical."

She nodded, playing with the silky strands of hair at his nape. "It is. We've found our way back to each other."

"Yes, we have." He nuzzled her nose before kissing her. She leaned into it as their feet sank into the cool sand and his body warmth enveloped her. It was a kiss of hope and the promise that came with a new beginning.

The world was once again at their feet and she knew they were going to take it on together this time.

Henry was conked out on the couch and it wasn't even 8:30. Sophie wished Aunt Mal hadn't taken Lily home so she had someone to keep her awake so she didn't fall asleep before her parents got home. Because their day at the pool had taken so much out of her, she feared she wouldn't make it until then.

"Can I get you anything, kid?" Aunt Emma asked, leaning against the couch.

Sophie shook her head. "I just want to make it to nine o'clock."

"I'm sure you will," Emma assured her. "Want to play a game?"


Her aunt sighed, sitting down next to her on the loveseat. "It's complicated. We often call your Aunt Mal a dragon because she can be scary. But like dragons, she's also very, very protective. Sometimes when she looks at me or your mom, she still sees the scared pregnant girls nursing broken hearts she met in that doctor's office. So she wants to protect us from those who hurt us. To her, your daddy still hurt your mom."

"But Daddy was hurt too," she replied, frowning. "He didn't choose to break Mom's heart. Grandmother broke them up."

"Well, your Aunt Mal thinks Robin should've fought more for Regina but if you ask me, the same is true for your mom. She could've fought for Robin. Aunt Mal will see that and I think she's starting to realize that your father has no intentions of hurting you and your mother."

Sophie nodded. "Good. Because I think he's going to be around for a long time."

The sound of a key in the lock drew her attention toward the front door and she hopped up, happy. "They're home."

"I guess they finished early," Emma commented, checking her watch.

Sophie frowned, worried now. "Is that a bad thing?"

Laughter echoed as the door opened and her parents entered, both smiling. "Hey there, sweetheart," Regina greeted.

"You're home early," Emma repeated to the couple.

Robin nodded, raising his hand. "My fault, I'm afraid. I wanted to spend some time with Sophie."
"I was more than happy to agree to that," Regina said, pulling off her shoes. "These are gorgeous but not very comfortable."

"So I may have also promised a foot rub," he added, grinning at her.

Emma glanced down at Sophie. "I think the date went well. Don't worry, kid."

Regina frowned. "Were you worried, Sophie?"

"I thought maybe Aunt Mal ruined your date," she confessed, feeling good to get it off her chest.

"It's going to take a lot more than her to chase me off," Robin assured her, wrapping an arm around both her and her mother. "I am never letting you two go again."

Emma grinned. "Well, I'm going to wake my son up and drag him home so I can leave you three to your family time."

Regina pulled away. "I'll help you."

As they woke Henry and got him off the couch, Sophie curled against her father. "You and Mom really had a great time on your date?" she asked.

"We did," he replied. "All we need is each other and we're happy."

"Exactly." Regina returned, letting him wrap his arm around her again. She then closed the hug to trap Sophie in the middle. "Group hug!"

Sophie laughed, pressed between her parents. Looking up, she spotted her father giving her mother a quick kiss. Her mother blinked once before giving a small smile, as if she couldn't believe he had done that. Or perhaps as if she couldn't believe she had him.

Aunt Mal wasn't going to scare her father off because they were all going to fight to keep this, Sophie knew. One day, her aunt was going to see Robin was a good guy and start protecting him and Roland the same way she protected everyone else. Then they would all be one big, giant, strange yet happy family.
Chapter 8: Past and Future

Regina sat in the lobby of the law office, her briefcase on her lap as she tried not to shake her leg from nerves. She reminded herself that she was just there to get Robin legally declared Sophie's father and to get advice on what their next steps should be, not because she had done anything wrong. Yet it still felt like she was waiting to see the principal after being called out of class.

"Sorry," Robin said, entering the office. He hurried over to her, plopping down in the chair next to her. "I was driving around trying to find a spot. Where did you park?"

"Town hall. It's only a block away, so I walked," she replied.

He chuckled. "Lucky."

"You know, there's a spot designated for the mayor's spouse. I could get you a permit and you can start using it," she offered.

"Are you proposing to me, Madam Mayor?" He raised an eyebrow.

She gave him a look, pressing her lips together to keep from laughing. "You know it's too soon for that. But not too soon for some perks."

He laughed. "Thank you, Regina. But I think I'll continue to find my own parking spot for a little bit longer."

"Madam Mayor? Ms. Tink will see you now," the secretary said, motioning to the door behind her.

Regina stood as did Robin, who frowned. "Tink? We're seeing Tink?"

"Yes," she said, frowning now as well. "Why? Do you have a problem with that?"

"No, not at all. Tink actually helped me a few years back, when I had my ex's maternal rights to Roland terminated," he said, placing a hand on Regina's back as they entered Tink's office.

Tink was a petite woman with blonde hair that was pulled into a bun atop her head. She wore a dark green dress with black pumps. Regina believed she looked a bit too young to be the accomplished lawyer Mal promised she was but Tink did look welcoming. And Robin had worked with her…

"Robin! It's so good to see you again." Tink paused before adding: "I think."

He laughed, shaking her hand. "In this case, yes."

"Well, why don't you two have a seat and you can tell me what you need my help with," Tink said, motioning to the two chairs in front of her desk.

Regina took a seat as her mind raced. She had just learned more about Robin in two minutes than she had in almost a month. He had gone to Tink and while it had been clear that Roland's mother...
was no longer in the picture, she now had confirmation. Terminating maternal rights was pretty final.

Tink smiled at them. "So, what can I do for you?"

"It's a bit of a long story, but basically I would like Robin to be legally recognized as my daughter's father," Regina explained.

"And is he? If so, are you sure? Will a paternity test be needed?" Tink asked, pulling out some papers.

Robin shook his head. "Paternity is not a question. We know I'm Sophie's father. It's just the birth certificate doesn't say it."

Tink nodded. "Well, that should be simple enough to fix. We just need to file an affidavit with the court. Is there anything else you want to discuss? Custody? Support?"

She shook her head. "We're pretty good there. I don't think we'll need to courts to help us work that out."

"Okay," Tink replied, "but you let me know if you two change your mind."

"I don't think we will." Robin smiled at Regina, setting her at ease again.

Once Tink promised to get the paperwork completed and filed with the court, she stood and shook their hands. "I'm glad to see you for a happier reason," she told Robin.

"Me too," he said. "Though I hope the next time I see you, it isn't in a professional capacity at all."

She laughed. "I agree. Have a good day, you two."

"Thank you," Regina replied, shaking Tink's hand. She let Robin guide her out of the office and out onto the street.

He turned to face her, smiling. "Can I entice the mayor to join me for an early lunch?"

She checked her watch and grinned. "I think so. I did tell them not expect me until after lunch."

"Perfect." He held out his hand to her. "Is there any place in particular you want to go?"

"There's a small café up the block. It's not as good as Granny's, but it does have a nice selection of sandwiches. We could go there," she suggested, taking his hand.

They walked over to the café in silence, their hands swinging between them. Questions swirled around her head but she didn't dare voice them. Even though they were together and trying again, she still didn't know how long it would take before he would tell her about Roland's mother. Did she even deserve to know?

Once they were seated and their orders taken, Robin took both her hands in his. "I bet you have lots of questions after that."

"Well, yes," she said, rubbing the back of his hands. "But you don't have to answer them if you're not ready."

He shook his head. "No, I don't want this hanging over me as we head into our new relationship."

Touched, she nodded. "What was her name?"
"Marian," he said. "Marian Maiden. She used to work as a waitress at a diner by one of my camps. I used to go in there a lot, especially for their coffee. We struck up a conversation one day and about a week later, she asked me out on a date."

"A woman with initiative. I like it." Regina smiled.

He nodded. "And I liked her. I enjoyed spending time with her and I felt we really clicked." 

"So you fell in love?"

"Yeah," he replied, voice sounding distant. "But not the way I fell for you."

Regina wanted to melt at that but he had said it with almost a hint of regret. She wasn't sure what to make of it then.

"Still, Marian and I seemed to work," he said. "I proposed to her and she accepted. A couple months later, we found out we were expecting Roland. I could see our future so clear."

"It sounds like you were happy," Regina replied, squeezing his hands. "It's okay. I wanted you to be happy."

He gave her a sad smile. "I was happy. Marian, though, wasn't. And it was all my fault."

That confused Regina as she couldn't imagine Robin doing nothing to make sure his partner was happy. "How?"

"I didn't love her the way she deserved," he said, voice cracking. "She always felt she was lacking in my eyes because she wasn't you."

Regina just felt more confused. "Did you compare her to me?"

"Not aloud, no."

"Did you talk about me a lot?"

He scratched behind his ear. "No, not really. I told her some stories but stopped when I realized they upset her."

None of his answers chased her confusion away and she frowned. "Then I don't get why she would feel so inadequate."

"She just…She could just feel it," he replied. "Six months after Roland was born, I woke up to find her things gone and a letter on the kitchen table saying she couldn't take it anymore. It was just me and a colicky baby boy. Thank god for Will."

Regina could tell Robin felt as if Marian's leaving was his fault but she couldn't fathom any reason for a woman to walk away from her infant son. She knew that no matter how little sleep she got, how frustrated she became, she would never be able to walk away from Sophie. It seemed she wasn't getting the full story and she wasn't sure why.

She decided to drop it for now, though, as Robin was clearly upset. His cheeks were growing red and she thought she saw tears in his eyes. Regina rubbed his hands. "I'm glad he was there for you. I wish I had been, though I might've been the last person you wanted to see after all that."

"I almost came to Storybrooke then," he admitted softly. "I was only about forty-five minutes away. And I thought…I don't think I was really thinking, honestly. I just wanted to see you
"What stopped you?" she asked, wondering what it would've been like if she and Robin had been reunited earlier. If he had just walked up to her and Sophie in Storybrooke back then, would she have welcomed him back or pushed him away?

He pressed his lips together. "I eventually talked myself out of it, saying that it was one thing to want you to move on and be happy and another thing to see it. It was a pain I didn't need."

She nodded. "I guess that makes sense. Besides, Mother may have still tried to keep us apart. We may not have worked."

"I guess it's all about timing, eh?" He grinned at her as their food arrived. "Why don't we discuss something more pleasant?"

"Like what?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Whatever you want. I'm all ears."

Regina nodded, deciding to tell him a few stories from Sophie's childhood. She still felt like there was more to the Marian story but she also knew she wouldn't get it from Robin so there was no use in pushing.

"Papa! Papa! Nan and Pops are calling on the laptop!" Roland called from the living room.

Robin sighed, looking over the groceries he still had to put away. Everything that needed to be in the freezer or refrigerator was already unpacked, and he only had a few bags left. Roland could talk with his grandparents for that time. "Okay, you can answer it," he called back.

After letting out a cheer, Roland was soon happily chatting with his grandparents while Robin quickly put the rest of the food away. Once he was done, he took a deep breath and headed into the living room.

"There he is!" Sara chirped, smiling at Robin. "All the groceries away?"

"Yes, they are." He picked up Roland and settled him on his lap. "How are you two?"

Richard sat down again, grinning at his son. "We're good. It's been raining so we've been mostly keeping to the house since our old bones can't handle it."

"You're not that old, Pops," Roland replied with a chuckle.

"Make sure that boy gets extra dessert tonight," Richard told Robin, grinning as Roland cheered.

Shaking his head, Robin patted his son's side. "Can I speak to Nan and Pops alone for a bit?"

"Okay. I'll go pick out my dessert for tonight." He jumped off Robin's lap and raced from the room.

Robin turned to his father, giving him a stern look. "Thanks for that, Dad. Just what I need tonight—an overactive kindergartener."

"You're welcome." Richard grinned. "Will you also have an overactive ten years old girl too?"

"Not tonight. Regina and I are still working out visitation, but I do have Sophie this weekend." Robin smiled at the thought of two whole days with his daughter.
Sara smiled as well. "Good. We'll be able to talk to her then. Might we also be lucky enough to meet her mother? It's been eleven years, Robin."

"I know, Mum. I'll talk to her and see if she'll come over for lunch or something. That way it won't be too late for us to call you. I want you to meet her too," he replied.

Richard studied him, stroking his own beard. "What exactly is going on between you two? Are you just co-parenting Sophie or…?"

"We're dating," Robin confirmed. "We talked and realized we still had strong feelings for each other. But we're taking things slow, knowing we can't just pretend the past eleven years didn't happen."

Sara nodded. "That's very smart of you. It sounds like you two have good heads on your shoulders and are serious about this relationship."

"Which is a very good reason for us to meet her," Richard added.

Robin rolled his eyes. "I said I'd talk to her about it, Dad. We have a date tomorrow night. I'll bring it up then."

"Good," Richard said, before leaning back. "Now, how goes house hunting?"

"Pretty good. I'm going to see a few places tomorrow and I figured if I see one I really like, I can go back with Regina for a second opinion. She really knows this town."

Sara chuckled. "Yes, I'm sure that's the only reason you want her to see the house."

"I value you her opinion, yes." At his mother's pointed look, Robin sighed. "If we do get married, and that's a big if right now, we'd most likely live in Regina's house. She owns it outright and she grew up in it."

"Oh," his mother said. "Never mind."

Robin leaned forward. "Can we change the subject? Please?"

His parents nodded. "So, any plans for the rest of the summer?" his father asked.

Robin relaxed, stretching his arm along the back of the couch. "I'm looking to either rent or buy a house. Looks like we're having a staycation, honestly…"

Sophie sat in the oversized plaid chair in Dr. Hopper's office, her feet almost touching the ground. His Dalmatian Pongo lay at her feet as the doctor handed her a small bottle of water. He took his own seat across from her and smiled. "Sophie, do you know why you're here?"

"Because of Daddy," she replied. "Because he just came back into my life."

Dr. Hopper nodded. "Your mother and I want to make sure you're adjusting okay."

That confused Sophie and she frowned. "Why? I'm really happy to have a father and a brother. It's great."

"I'm sure. But it was all very sudden, so why don't we just talk about it? Okay?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Okay. Where do you want to start?"
"Well, why don't you tell me about your father?" Dr. Hopper leaned back, smiling softly at her.

"He's really, really nice," she said, bouncing a little. "And smart. And loving. He takes care of me and will be strict if he has to be."

Dr. Hopper chuckled. "I can't imagine you did something very bad."

"No. But I might've tried to get around Mom using him and Daddy wouldn't let that happen," she confessed.

"I see. Anything else you want to tell me about him?"

"He's British and stayed here after going to college, where he met my mom. He runs camps for kids, especially those who can't afford to go on vacations. And he's good at archery but I haven't seen it yet. I'm hoping he'll teach me, though," she replied.

It seemed the floodgates were opened and she continued: "He's also funny. And he sings when he thinks no one is listening. I heard him the other day when he visited and he offered to make us popcorn. I was going to the bathroom and heard him singing Bare Necessities from The Jungle Book. He's a pretty good singer."

"He sounds pretty nice," Dr. Hopper said, leaning forward. "So there are no problems?"

Sophie hesitated and he softened his voice. "It's okay, Sophie. You can tell me."

"It's just…I stayed the night at his house during the Summer Festival. He didn't have chocolate chips for the pancakes and his orange juice had pulp in it. It was just all wrong," she huffed, crossing her arms.

Dr. Hopper nodded, leaning forward. "I see. Was this sleepover planned? Did your daddy and your mom talk about it beforehand?"

Thinking back over the night, Sophie frowned as she shook her head "No, it wasn't. She even said Daddy didn't have time to get what I liked."

"So next time you can tell him what you like," Dr. Hopper said.

"But shouldn't he know?" she asked. "Mom knows."

He nodded. "Of course she knows, Sophie. Your mother has raised you for the past ten years and has learned what you like and what you don't like. It isn't magic. Your father can't read your mind. You and your mother will have to tell him what you like and what you don't like."

"He knows what Roland likes," she said, pouting as she thought of how easily her father could pick out something for her brother but needed help picking out something for her.

"Because he's spent every day with him," Dr. Hopper said. He sighed before asking: "What's your father's favorite color?"

Sophie opened her mouth before closing it again, blinking a few times. "I...I don't know."

"What's your mother's?"

"Purple," she replied. It was something she had known since she was a little girl.

"What's his favorite food?"
"I think it might be burgers," she said, scrunching her nose. "I see him eating that a lot. I know his favorite ice cream flavor is Rocky Road, just like me."

Dr. Hopper nodded. "And your mother's favorite food?"

"Lasagna," she replied. "And apple turnovers."

"Do you see my point? You know your mother's favorites but not your father's because you've lived with her. You've seen what she likes."

Sophie considered what he said and nodded. "I guess so. So I have to spend more time with Daddy to learn what he likes and so he learns what I like?"

"Yes," Dr. Hopper said. "Though I think talking will also help as well. Don't you?"

"I do," she replied.

He nodded, leaning back. "Now, tell me more about your brother, Roland."

"He's great. I've always wanted a little brother or sister and now I have one! He likes to play with me and loves to spend time with me. And I like to spend time with him. I really like reading to him." Sophie hesitated, though, not sure if she wanted to continue.

Dr. Hopper leaned forward. "I sense there's more that you want to say. It's okay, Sophie. You're in a safe space."

She nodded. "Okay…Sometimes I feel jealous of Roland. That he's closer to Daddy than I am, that he got to spend all so much time with him. I think about everything they must do together and wish I did it with Daddy."

"That makes sense," he replied. "But do you hate your brother because of it?"

"No! I could never hate him," she insisted. "He's my brother."

He smiled. "Just checking. And it's okay that you're a little jealous of your brother. Just don't focus on what you didn't have or you'll miss what you do."

"I will," she said, feeling very grown up.

"Good." Dr. Hopper settled back into his seat. "What else do you want to talk about?"

Sophie bit her lower lip. "Can we keep talking about Daddy and Roland? I like talking about them."

"We can talk about whatever you like." He smiled, leaning back in his chair and she started talking about her new family yet again.

The doorbell echoed throughout the house. Regina hurried from the kitchen to her front door, smiling when she saw Will standing on her stoop. "Thank you for coming," she said.

"Anything for you," he replied, stepping in. His brown eyes swept her house and he let out a low whistle. "I know you said once you came from money but this is a fancy house."

"Thanks. Can I give you a tour?" Regina closed the door.
"Depends. Do you have marble anywhere?" He gave her a cheeky grin. "Like in your way too big for normal people bathroom?"

She rolled her eyes. "We're not that rich. And even if we had marble, I would've gotten rid of it after Sophie came along. It hurts to fall on marble."

He chuckled, following her to the kitchen. "Is Sophie around?"

"She's at the library," Regina replied. "Robin is going to pick her up so we can discuss her weekend visit."

Will nodded. "I'm glad they are getting closer. And I'm glad you two decided to give it another go. He's happier than I've seen him in years."

"I'm happier too," she admitted, smiling. "Can I get you something?"

"Depends. I'm not entirely sure why you called me over," he said, taking a seat.

She nodded. "I was hoping you could fill in some gaps for me about Robin."

"What sort of gaps?" he asked, eyes narrowing. "Cause I'm not going to appreciate being used for information you can get straight from him."

"I understand. It's just…he told me about Marian but…"

Will held up his hand, nodding. "Say no more. That's a subject I have no problem discussing."

She sat down, relieved. "Really? It's just that I felt he didn't tell me the whole story."

"You're right," he told her. "Mostly because he doesn't want to acknowledge the whole story. For some reason, it's easier for him to blame himself. I think it's his guilt."

"Because he didn't love her the way he loved me?" she asked, playing with a napkin.

He nodded, reaching out to cover her hands. "Don't blame yourself for what happened to their relationship. It imploded because of Marian, not you."

Regina tucked her hair behind her ear. "So now that you know what I want to talk about, can I get you anything?"

"Do you have beer? I think I'll need a bottle for this," Will replied, leaning against his arms on the table as he grinned at her.

She nodded, grabbing a beer for him and pouring herself a glass of red wine. After all, she was in for the rest of the day. Regina carried both over to the table and sat back down. "What didn't Robin tell me about Marian?"

"A lot," Will said. "Mostly because he tends to ignore it due to his own guilt. He blames the breakdown entirely on himself when most of the blame goes to Marian."

"Are you sure that's not your own biases toward Robin?"

He shook his head. "I had a more objective, outsider perspective. At first, Marian seemed good for him. She was smart, funny and made him smile. He almost seemed like how he was with you."

"That sounds good," she replied. "What happened?"
"Things started happening way too fast. They had only been dating for a few months when she asked to move in. Robin hadn't thought they were that serious yet but she said her lease was up and the rent was going up so she couldn't afford to stay there and, well, his chivalry took over," Will said.

Regina frowned. "So they moved in together?"

He nodded. "And that's when things really started going downhill."

Will spoke how Marian started to snoop around Robin's things and discovered all his mementos of the summer spent with Regina. She had demanded to know who the woman in the picture was and Robin told her. "He admitted you were the love of his life," Will said, taking another sip. "And she lost it."

Regina frowned. "Lost it how?"

"She suddenly got very suspicious of Robin and very paranoid, certain he was cheating on you. Demanded to see his phone to make sure he wasn't talking to you behind her back no matter how many times we told her that you were ancient history."

"And Robin tolerated this?"

He nodded. "She wasn't always so suspicious. It came in cycles. Sometimes she seemed perfectly normal for a few weeks and then bam! The cheating allegations would come out and she would be suspicious of everything Robin did."

"It almost sounds like…well…a psychological disorder," Regina said. "I'm no psychiatrist, but I'm thinking borderline personality disorder?"

Will shrugged. "Probably. We tried to suggest she see someone and Robin even offered to go to couples' counseling with her, but she kept refusing."

She frowned. "So he realized something was wrong too?"

"I wish," he replied with a sigh. "I think he wanted to get help…I dunno, falling out of love with you so he could love Marian the way he thought he wasn't, the way she insisted he wasn't."

"Robin sounds like he was a mess then too."

Will paused and sighed. "Maybe he was."

"So Marian's paranoia got worse?" Regina prompted.

"Yes. While we tried to get him to either leave her or get her help, Robin doubled down and proposed."

"Was he serious about marrying her or was he trying to reassure her that he wasn't going to leave her for me?"

"I don't know," Will replied. "To be honest with you, I don't think Robin even knew. But he proposed and she accepted. Then she got pregnant."

Regina leaned back in her chair, toying her lip with her teeth. "How was she when she was pregnant?"

"Not bad, honestly. She seemed to mellow out, almost accepted that Robin had chosen her over
you. Marian looked forward to being a mother and we all hoped this meant the start of something new for Robin," Will said.

"It was. Just not the one you thought," she interjected.

He nodded. "Robin was over the moon when Roland was born and we were happy for him too. But pretty soon, we started to suspect that Marian was suffering from post-partum depression."

"Did Robin?"

"I think he did," he replied. "I know he spoke to Roland's pediatrician and the two tried to encourage her to get help."

Regina pressed her lips together before asking: "Let me guess—she refused to get some, right?"

"Bingo. Instead, she got more paranoid that every time Robin left the house, he was out with you." Will pointed at her.

She sank back in her seat. "It sounds like I broke them up without actually doing anything. I'm impressed Robin doesn't blame me."

"He blames himself," Will reminded her. "But the person who deserves all the blame is Marian. She didn't get help and she just kept getting worse and worse until she decided she couldn't do it anymore. Robin woke up one morning with a crying, hungry six-month-old and a letter from his fiancée telling him he should just go find you as you would be a better mother and wife."

"Oh," she said softly. She wondered if Will knew how close Robin had come to following Marian's advice.

"I'm glad you two found your way back to each other," he said, taking her hand. "I think you'll be able to help him heal from the hurt Marian caused him."

She gave him a shaky smile. "I hope so."

The door opened and she heard Sophie call out: "Mom? You here?"

"In the kitchen, sweetheart," she replied, pulling her hand from Will's grasp. "Did you have a good day with Miss Belle?"

"I did." Sophie appeared in the doorway, her eyes lighting up. "Uncle Will!"

A blur of dark curls and red sped past her. "Uncle Will!"

"Roland!" Will caught the young boy, hoisting him high in the air. "How are you?"

"Good," Roland replied with a chuckle as his uncle settled him on his hip.

Will then opened his free arm and pulled Sophie close to him. "And how's this beautiful girl doing today?"

"I'm good, Uncle Will," Sophie said, giggling as she hugged him. "It's good to see you."

"Oi, Scarlett, you stealing my family?" Robin strode into the kitchen, smiling as his eyes sparkled.

Will chuckled. "I tried but Regina seems determined to stick with you. I think these two are as well."
Roland and Sophie nodded as Robin leaned closer to Regina. "Is that true, lovely?"

"It is," she said, tugging on his shirt. "I'm only yours."

He grinned. "Good."

She kissed him, running her hand through his hair as he wrapped his arm around her waist to pull her closer. Regina moaned into the kiss, opening her mouth to him. His tongue swept inside it before dueling with her own. She grew lightheaded and it felt like time had stopped.

Until two little voices groaned: "Eww."

Regina broke the kiss and turned her head to find both Roland and Sophie staring at them with their noses scrunched up. Will was smirking. "Come on, you two. Let's give your parents some privacy."

He ushered the kids out of the room, leaving Robin and Regina alone. Robin tucked some of her hair behind her ear. "While I'm surprised to see Will here, it is a pleasant surprise. Are you pumping him for information about me?"

"Yes," she replied honestly.

Robin seemed a bit surprised but he recovered well, smiling. "Well, I wouldn't believe everything you hear. Will may have matured but there are some things that never change."

She laughed. "Don't worry. We were actually talking about Marian."

"Oh," he said, growing somber. "Why?"

"Because I wanted to get an outsider's opinion of your relationship. You know, get another view of it," she said, playing with his collar.

He sighed. "It's not your fault Marian left me and Roland."

"From what I heard from Will, it wasn't your fault either," she replied, trying to meet his eyes. He kept staring at a spot on the floor, though. Will was right about his lingering guilt. Regina hoped she could help him deal with it.

Sophie appeared in the doorway. "Mom? Daddy? Uncle Will wants to know if you need more privacy or if you're going to start dinner."

Robin sighed, pulling away from her. "Tell your uncle he needs to get more patience. But yes, I'm going to start the hamburgers."

"Ask him if he wants a salad to go with it that," Regina told her daughter.

"French fries!" Will's and Roland's voices echoed from the living room.

Robin rolled his eyes. "He gets along so well with children because he's still a child himself in many ways."

"You can have French fries AND a salad," Regina called out. They heard two groans before Will and Roland yelled back that it was okay.

She turned back to find Sophie sidling up to her father, watching as he pulled out the chop meat to start making the hamburgers. "Can I help you?" she asked him.
"Of course," he said, smiling at her. Regina enjoyed watching the two together, how much they adored and loved each other. It made her heart swell up and brought tears to her eyes as she thought of all the time they had missed.

"Mom? Are you okay?" Sophie asked, tilting her head as she frowned. "Is something wrong?"

Regina shook her head, smiling as she hugged her daughter. "Just admiring two of my favorite people."

Leaning closer, Robin kissed her forehead. "Why don't you start the fries? Will and Roland will both be very ugly if they aren't ready on time."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said, preheating the oven. She watched as Robin and Sophie went outside to her barbecue and smiled as she poured out the French fries on the baking sheet. It was going to be a perfect night from here on out.

She could worry about Marian and the truth later.

Chapter End Notes

Here's the next chapter! Sorry it took so long. And it probably would've been up earlier but I had written almost five thousand more words. So now that's the basis of Chapter 9, which means that might be up soon too!

I hope everyone enjoyed this!

-Mac
Chapter 9: Bonding

Robin pushed his cart through the grocery store, turning to his children. "Okay, so, let's get some food for this weekend. Sophie, feel free to pick out what you like. And keep in mind I have spoken with your mother, so I know what you can and can't have."

Sophie didn't seem to mind, almost vibrating with excitement. "How many sweets did she say I can have?"

"She said that because it's a special occasion you can have ice cream and then your choice—a bag of sweets or a bag of chips," Robin said.

"Okay," she replied, smiling widely. "This is going to be the best weekend ever!"

Robin laughed, giving her a one-armed hug. "Yes, it is. I'm going to do everything to guarantee it."

"Can we make s'mores?" Roland asked, holding onto the back of the cart. "Like you do at camp?"

Sophie's eyes grew wide. "Can we, Daddy? Please?"

With two pairs of pleading brown eyes focused on him, Robin melted and he nodded. "Okay. We can make s'mores."

His children cheered and Robin pushed the cart into the produce aisle. "I'm glad you're all excited for vegetables!" he joked.

Roland groaned but Sophie continued to bounce up and down. "Can we get some baby carrots? I love them!"

"Of course," he said. "Your mother said that."

"Is Ms. Regina coming? Should we get something for her to eat?" Roland asked, looking hopeful.

Robin pressed his lips together. He had often worried about a lack of a maternal figure in his son's life with the closest being his mother who was across the ocean. Though he had several female friends, none ever took on a motherly role toward Roland. And Roland had never looked up at one of them as a mother figure. It was clear now, though, that he saw Regina that way. Robin figured it was because Regina was a mother and reacted to Roland that way, taking care of him and patiently answering any questions he had. There was also the fact that she had bonded with Roland over their shared fear of thunderstorms, cuddling him that night to make him feel better.

Then there was earlier in the week when they had had dinner at Regina's. After Will had bowed out following dessert, Sophie had begged him and Roland to stay for a family move night. He had caved easily to his little girl and offered to make popcorn. When he returned to the living room, Sophie was lying on the floor waiting to start the movie while Roland was curled up on Regina's lap. As the movie progressed, he clung to her more and more until he was sound asleep on her shoulder. Robin had offered to take his son from her but she had waved him off, rubbing the boy's
back as she continued to watch the movie.

"Ms. Regina is only coming for lunch tomorrow," Robin replied. "She's going to be on our phone call to Nan and Pops."

Roland frowned. "She's not sleeping over with Sophie tonight?"

"No. It's just me, you and Sophie. We're having some family bonding."

"But Ms. Regina is our family. Isn't she?" Roland asked, looking up at him with big brown eyes.

Robin felt like he was in a Catch-22. Regina was family because she was Sophie's mother. No matter what happened between them, that was always going to be true. But they were taking it slow, so she wanted to give the three of them time to bond as a family. He just wasn't sure he could explain that to a kindergartner.

"Mom has some work she needs to do," Sophie told her brother. "Besides, I want to spend time with you and Daddy. I can spend time with my mom any other day."

"But I want to spend time with Ms. Regina!" Roland's lower lip began to tremble and Robin sensed a rare temper tantrum from his son coming soon.

Sophie swooped in again, rubbing Roland's back. "Well, I'm sure if we ask really nicely, Mom and Daddy will let you sleepover at my house. Then you can spend all night with Mom and me!"

Roland's eyes widened and he looked back at Robin. "Is that true, Papa? Can I spend the night at Ms. Regina's again?"

"If Ms. Regina says yes, then you can," he replied. "But let's focus on our night together, okay? The longer we spend here in the store, the less time we have at home!"

His children nodded and he pushed the cart forward. Robin hugged Sophie again with one arm, kissing her head. "Thank you for helping with your brother."

"What are big sisters for?" she asked, grinning up at him. She then stepped away to pick up her baby carrots.

Robin pulled out his phone and sent off a quick text to Regina. *Looks like you've stolen my son's heart. He absolutely adores you and was upset you aren't staying over. Thankfully Sophie saved the day. I hope you don't mind letting Roland stay over one night.*

A few aisles over, his phone dinged with Regina's response. *The feeling is definitely mutual. I'd be happy to have Roland spend the night with me and Sophie.*

He smiled as he read it over before sending back a text of thanks and that they were all looking forward to seeing her tomorrow. Robin tucked his phone back into his pocket and moved his children along smartly through the rest of the aisles.

They got on line and Roland grew antsy. Robin knew it was fueled by hunger and he wanted to get his children home so he could feed them. But first, he needed to keep Roland occupied. He dropped a few quarters into Sophie's hand. "Why don't you take Roland to ride the rides in front of the store? I'll watch you two through the window and will come get you once I'm done."

"Okay, Daddy," she said, taking Roland's hand. "Come on. Do you want to ride the horse or the spaceship first?"
"Spaceship!" Roland chirped as they walked away. "I want to go to space like an astronaut!"

Robin chuckled as he began to place his groceries onto the conveyor belt. A deep voice sent a jolt through him, though. "Robin Locksley, soccer dad. Who would've thought?"

"Keith Nott," he said through gritted teeth. He turned around to find the man smirking at him. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Keith chuckled. "This is just a coincidence. We just happened to be in the same grocery store at the same time."

"I didn't realize you live in Storybrooke," Robin said, trying to keep his voice even. His blood, though, was boiling.

The other man shrugged. "Not really. I live in nearby Mist Haven, but the grocery stores here have better deals."

"I see." Robin tried to figure out a way to get out of the conversation and move on.

Keith glanced out the window, where Sophie watched Roland ride the spaceship. "I know that's Regina Mills' daughter. I saw them a few weeks ago. Judging by her age, I'm guessing she was conceived during the summer we all spent together."

"She was." Robin glanced out the window as well, smiling as he watched his beautiful daughter playing with her brother. His children would always be the best things he had ever done in this world.

"Condoms too complicated for you, Locksley?" Keith asked. "Two children I see, though I don't think the boy is Regina's as well."

"My family is none of your business," Robin hissed, watching as the cashier scanned his items. The young woman glanced between the two men with concerned eyes.

Keith chuckled. "I guess it's not. Though I always thought I'd be chasing after you for unpaid child support. You didn't seem much like the marrying kind, just the fooling around one. Guess I was partly right."

Robin clenched his teeth, handing the cashier his card to pay for his groceries. He was certainly the marrying kind—life just didn't work out that way for him. Not yet anyway. But he wouldn't let Keith's comment slide—he couldn't. So he turned to face him. "You don't know me at all. And in the future, I'd appreciate if you stayed away from me and my own."

"Does your own include Regina?" Keith asked, challenging him. They both knew Regina hated to be possessed, to be thought of as nothing more than someone's belonging. Keith had sported a black eye for it for about a week.

Taking a deep breath, Robin sighed his receipt and tucked his card back into his wallet. "Regina can fight her own battles. But if she says stay away, then you should listen to her. Got it?"

"Or what?" Keith taunted.

"She's the mayor," Robin reminded him. "Her best friend is the sheriff and her other friend might be a dragon in human clothes. They'd probably never find your body. I'm not the one you should be worried about, though I will gladly provide a shovel or an alibi."

Keith seemed to be at a loss for words as Robin packed his bags into his cart. He then smiled at
the other man. "Have a good evening, Keith."

Without waiting for the response, Robin pushed his cart out of the store and approached his children. The spaceship stopped rocking and he smiled at them. "Okay, you two. Let's go home and get dinner started."

Roland jumped onto the back of the cart again while Sophie grasped onto the handle, her hand close to Robin's. She grinned up at him and his conversation with Keith Nott melted into the distant past. He was just going to focus on her and her brother for the rest of the night and enjoy himself.

Sophie lay in her bed at her father's house that night, staring at the ceiling. He had grilled chicken kabobs on his barbecue and she had eaten three skewers by herself. Even Roland seemed to enjoy them, though he had initially complained about the vegetables in it.

After the kabobs, Robin had then lit the fire pit on his property so they could make s'mores. He helped each of them with their marshmallows before they smushed them between chocolate and graham crackers. Sophie and Roland laughed at the messes they made, especially when their father made the biggest one, getting melted marshmallow in his beard.

They then had laid on the grass as Robin pointed out different stars and constellations in the night sky until he realized Roland had fallen asleep. Sophie had felt her eyes start to grow heavy and didn't fight her father when he suggested she get ready for bed.

Now, though, she was wide awake. She wasn't sure why. It was dark and quiet enough and her bed was just as comfortable as the one back at home. All she knew was that sleep wasn't coming.

She pushed back the blankets and slid from bed, clutching Applesauce close. Her black wrist brace stood out against his crème fur as she opened the door with her good hand. Glancing down the hall, she was happy to see her father's light was still on and she headed down to his room.

Robin sat in bed, glasses perched on his nose like her mother did with hers when she went through her paperwork. He frowned at something, tapping his pen against a pad. She wondered if she should just go back to bed and not bother him.

"Sophie?" he asked, taking off his glasses as he put his work to the side. He placed his glasses down on top of the papers before frowning. "What's wrong?"

"I couldn't sleep," she said, padding further into the room.

He smiled, patting a spot beside him on the bed. "I think that's from the s'mores. The sugar high has hit you."

She climbed into bed, snuggling against him under the covers. He wrapped an arm around her, smelling like pine trees. "What do you want to do, sweetheart?" he asked.

"Can we talk?" she asked, settling Applesauce next to her before looking up at him. After talking with Dr. Hopper, she knew she had a lot to learn about her father. She hoped she could start.

He tilted his head. "Talk? About what? And fair warning, if you say the 'birds and the bees,' I'm just going to fumble for words so you might as well wait for your mother to give you that talk."

She wasn't too sure what he was talking about so she just shook her head. "I want to get to know you."
"Okay," he said, turning on his side to face her. "What do you want to know, sweetheart?"

"Can I have a piece of paper and pen to write down the answers?" she asked, looking over at his nightstand.

He let out a soft chuckle but handed her his pad as well as the pen. "I doubt I'm that interesting."

"I'm going to be asking you things I don't want to forget," she explained.

"Oh? Like what?"

She placed the pen to the paper before asking: "When's your birthday?"

"April eighteenth," he replied and she wrote it down.

"When's Roland's?"

"March eighth."

Sophie jotted that down, thinking of all the questions she wanted to ask her father. "What's your favorite color?"

"Green," he replied. "What's yours?"

"Lily teases me about it and says I'm a girly-girl, but I love pink," she admitted, grinning at him.

Robin nodded, bopping her nose gently. "Don't let Lily get to you. If you like pink, then don't be ashamed of it. There is nothing wrong with being a girly-girl."

She giggled, nodding. "Okay. What's your favorite food?"

"Ahh, that's a tough one. I've grown quite fond of Granny's burgers and I can never say no to your mother's lasagna," he said.

"I don't think anyone can say no to Mom's lasagna," she replied. "You still haven't answered the question."

He chuckled. "You're right. I guess in the end, I would have to say my favorite food is just good old fashion fish and chips, just like they make them back home in England. I do miss those."

"Chips? Like potato chips?" she asked, confused.

His nose crinkled in disgust. "Oh, I'm going to have to teach you proper British terms. Chips are what you would call French fries. We call potato chips crisps."

Sophie wrote those down, nodding. "Are there a lot of things that have different names in England?"

"There's a good list of things, yeah," he replied. "We don't have to cover them all tonight."

"Okay. Let me think of another question," she said, tapping her chin. "What's your favorite movie?"

"Star Wars."

Sophie grinned. "Henry likes those movies. I've never seen them."
"What?" Her father looked horrified and indignant, clutching his chest. "Well, that's something that's going to have to be rectified. Your next sleepover weekend, we're popping popcorn and having a movie marathon."

"I think I'd like that," she replied, lying down now. Her eyes were growing heavy. "What kind of music do you listen to?"

He laid down as well, tucking his hand under cheek. "I like many things. Mostly classic rock. Beatles, Stones, the like."

Sophie nodded but her eyes were closed now and she felt like she was drifting off. "Will you sing to me?"

"Of course, sweetheart. But why don't we go back to your bed, okay?" She felt him pull back the blankets. "You're going to have to walk. I'm afraid I can't carry you like I do Roland."

She didn't move, her limbs feeling too heavy. But at the mention of her brother, one question popped into her mind and begged to be answered. She opened her eyes to look at her father. "Do you think about everything you've missed with me?"

"Every day since I met you," he replied, sitting down on her side of the bed. "I wish I had been there from the beginning, Soph. That I shared the memories your mum has of you, that I have with Roland. But we can't dwell in the land of what-ifs. We're here now and we're making our own memories. I'm not going to miss another moment."

"I love you, Daddy." She sat up, wrapping her arms around his neck and holding on tightly.

He hugged her back, kissing her head. "I love you too, Sophie."

She held his hand all the way back to her room, right until she climbed back into bed. He tucked her in, making sure she was comfortable before he sat on the floor and started to sing softly to her. It wasn't a lullaby—she was too old for those—but it was slow, soft and soothing. She drifted off to sleep, carried away to dreamland by her father's voice.

Regina got a very warm welcome when she stepped into Robin's house Saturday afternoon. She hadn't even got fully in when Roland had launched himself at her, wrapping his legs around her waist and his little arms around her neck. "I'm so glad you're here!"

"I'm glad to be here too," she said, kissing his nose.

"Mom!" Sophie ran to her, clinging to Regina's side. "We made s'mores last night."

Roland nodded. "They were really, really good. Can we make them when I stay over at your house?"

"We'll see," she replied, her mind still spinning as she cuddled both children close. This was certainly not what she was expecting when she left her house earlier.

"Is there any room for me?" Robin asked, smiling as he sauntered toward her. He leaned past her, closing the door before kissing her. "Hello."

She grinned as she pulled back. "Hi. I didn't realize I was so missed."

"You're amazing," he told her, making her blush. "Of course we missed you."
He then turned to his children. "Come on, you two. Let her get comfortable before we call your grandparents."

Sophie nodded, stepping away from Regina and closer to Robin. Roland, though, clung to her. "I want to stay with Ms. Regina."

"Okay, but only while I set up the laptop. I want to talk with Nan and Pops with just Ms. Regina at the start, so she can meet them. Understand?" Robin asked his son.

Roland pouted but nodded. "Okay, Papa. But is Ms. Regina staying after we're done talking with Nan and Pops?"

"Yes, I am, sweetheart," she said, rubbing his back. "We're all going to have lunch together."

"Good," he said, resting his head on her shoulder. "Can you read more of the Wonder Woman comics to me then?"

"I would love to. We can sit on the couch and read a few pages together, how's that?"

Roland nodded as Robin appeared. "Okay, my boy. You're going to have to stay here with Sophie while Ms. Regina comes with me."

Though he sighed, Roland let her put him down. He took Sophie's hand and she led him over to the stairs. "Why don't we read some of the Wonder Woman comic together too?"

"Okay," he said, sitting down next to her.

Robin took Regina's hand. "You ready?" he asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be," she replied, sitting down on her couch. Butterflies flew about her stomach and she took a calming breath.

"They're just my parents. Relax." He hit the button and the screen began to ring, like they were making a phone call.

She put on a smile but said out of the corner of her mouth: "Easy for you to say. You don't have to meet my parents."

The screen lit up as a beautiful woman with graying blonde hair appeared. She wore a pink sweater and smiled at the two of them. "Hullo, Robin. Your father is busy with the teapot because you know him. Can never make the tea ahead of time."

"It won't be hot!" Regina heard a male voice call off screen as the woman rolled her eyes.

Robin took Regina's hand. "Well, Mum, this is Regina Mills. Regina, this is my mum, Sara."

"It's pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Locksley," Regina said, squeezing Robin's hand.

Sara smiled. "You can call me Sara and it's lovely to finally meet you, Regina. We've been waiting a long time for this moment."

"Ooh, is Regina there?" Robin's father sat down, grinning at the camera. "I can see why you couldn't let this one go, Robin."

"Dad!" he exclaimed before turning to Regina with a sigh. "I'm sorry, Regina. That's my father, Richard."
"Nice to meet you," she said, trying not to look awkward.

Sara swatted her husband. "Behave, Richard."

"Okay. Let me just say, Robin, that you definitely need to keep your archery skills up to snuff for when Sophie grows up. You're going to be chasing away a lot of boys," Richard concluded.

"Well, then," Sara said, seemingly ignoring her husband. "Regina, why don't you tell us a bit more about yourself?"

Regina shrugged. "I'm not sure what's there to tell."

"You're the mayor, lovely. That's a pretty big deal," Robin prompted.

"I guess," she replied before telling his parents about her political career as well as more about Storybrooke. "I really have no desire to leave so I don't think my ambitions would go further than this small town. My mother is probably rolling in her grave."

She let out a little laugh, settling back against Robin's arm. He squeezed her, holding her close and she placed her hand on his lap. "I must say, Robin's already adjusted to being a politician's husband."

"I just stand behind her, smile and let her work her magic," he said, smiling at her.

"Don't be so modest," she chided, getting lost in his eyes. "You were wonderful at the ball, talking with people like you had lived here forever. Everyone loved you."

"This is just too sweet," Richard said, interrupting their moment and drawing their attention back to the camera. He was leaning forward, smiling at them.

"Sorry," Robin said, shifting away from her. "Guess we got caught up there for a moment."

Sara chuckled. "Clearly."

"I'll go get the children. You'll entertain Regina for me?" he asked, standing up. Once his parents nodded, he kissed her cheek and headed out of the room.

Regina tried not to fiddle with her pants now that she was alone with Robin's parents. She heard her mother's voice in her head, reminding her that it was a nervous habit and poor manners. Instead, she rested her hands on her lap.

"We're not here to judge and execute you," Richard said, picking his mug back up. "You can relax, Regina."

"I know there's a lot between Robin and myself," she started, thinking of letters sent and unsent. She thought of the miscommunication and meddling that kept them apart for ten years, that kept a father from his daughter. There was still a lingering cloud of anger and bitterness, emotions she knew Robin had shared with his parents over the years. She didn't have a clean slate and so had to start at a disadvantage, making her feel unworthy in the eyes of his parents.

Sara shook her head. "That's in the past. I'm focused on now. How you two smile at each other, how your eyes light up around each other, how you two lean on each other...Those are the important things, Regina."

Though touched by the woman's words, Regina still felt awkward. Sara, despite being an ocean away, could tell since she leaned closer to the camera. "The way I see it, something—fate, God,
whatever—has brought you two back together. I'd say someone wants you together. That definitely means something."

"Yes," Regina replied with a smile. "I guess so."

Robin returned with Sophie and Roland in tow. The boy bounded over to Regina, climbing onto her lap and settling against her. Sophie sat right next to her and Robin took his seat again. Richard and Sara fawned over their grandchildren as Regina finally started to relax.

After several more minutes of conversation, grandparents and grandchildren exchanged kisses to wrap up the call. Robin leaned forward to end the call when Sara stopped him. "I want a picture of the four of you," she announced.

"What?" he asked, confused. "How?"

"There's a way to take a picture by clicking a button. So you four squish together and I'll get a shot of you," she instructed.

Robin leaned back as Regina scooted closer to Sophie, who ended up squished between her parents in the end. They followed Sara's instructions until she had them in frame. "Smile and say cheese," she said.

"Cheese," the four said as the screen momentarily went black.

When it came back, Sara was smiling. "Perfect. Now I have a family picture to show off."

Family picture. The words sent a jolt through Regina as she realized they were a family. Perhaps they weren't a traditional family just yet but they were everything she had always dreamed of. Maybe fate really had brought them together again.

Regina ended up staying the night, though she hadn't planned on it. After lunch, she had curled up on the couch with Roland and some comic books while Robin took Sophie out in the yard to teach her how to shoot a bow and arrow. Halfway through Wonder Woman's adventure, Roland looked up at her with his soulful brown eyes and asked if she was staying for dinner.

"Oh," she said, caught off guard. "No. I was going to go home and leave you to spend the night with your father and sister."

His lower lip began to tremble. "Don't you like spending time with us?"

"Of course I do! I just thought you would want some time with your father and your sister, without me." She lifted him up and put him on her lap, running her fingers through his curls.

"But you're family too," he said, curling closer to her. "When you're here, it's like I have a mama too."

Regina's heart stopped for a moment as she fought tears. She wondered how long Roland had longed for a maternal figure in his life, someone closer than a grandmother an ocean away. "Well, if everyone agrees, I'd love to stay here tonight."

"Let's ask Papa!" Roland jumped off her lap, pulling on her hand.

"Ask Papa what?" Robin leaned against the couch, smiling at them.
Roland looked up at him. "Can Ms. Regina stay over tonight? Please? She said she would like to."

"If you don't mind me intruding on your time with Sophie," Regina said softly. "I want you two to bond."

He smiled. "We're bonding, Regina, don't worry. And if you want to stay, I would love to have you."

"What are we talking about?" Sophie jumped up, leaning over the back of the couch as she looked between her parents.

"I want Ms. Regina to stay the night," Roland said. "Papa said it's okay."

Robin rubbed Sophie's back. "Is it okay with you? Your mother doesn't want to intrude."

"It's fine," Sophie replied. "We can have a family night. I like those too."

Gasping, Roland turned to Regina. "So you'll stay? Please?"

She smiled, once again running her fingers through his hair. "Yes, I'll stay. I'll have to run home to get my things, but I'll be right back."

"Do you have to go now?" Roland asked, frowning. "Or can you play a game first?"

"I can definitely play a game first. Do you two want to join us?" she asked Robin and Sophie.

They nodded and Roland cheered. He hurried around the couch to take his sister's hand. "Come on, Sophie. Let's go pick a game."

Once the children were gone, Robin sat down next to Regina. He took her hand and kissed. "I'm glad you're staying."

"Me too." She scooted closer to him and let him wrap his arm around her. "You weren't kidding about Roland adoring me."

"No, I wasn't. You have enchanted him as much as you have enchanted me," Robin said, kissing her head. She chuckled, wondering if she should tell him what Roland had said about feeling like he had a mother when she was around or if it would make Robin feel like he was neglecting his son.

Roland and Sophie bounced back into the room, though, and she let it drop for now. She and Robin helped their children set up the game, ready for an afternoon of fun and family.

Clicking off his bathroom light, Robin stepped out into the bedroom. Regina sat on his bed, holding the picture of them on the beach from that wonderful summer eleven years ago. "That's my favorite picture of us," he said.

"It is a good shot," she agreed, setting it back down. She bit her lip. "Can I confess something to you?"

"Of course." He sat down next to her on the bed and took her hand.

She grew a bit sheepish. "When I took Roland home after the Summer Festival, I checked out the house...including this room. I saw the photograph in your luggage but put it back when I heard
Robin grinned, imagining Regina's eyes going wide and her shoving the picture into his luggage as she ran back downstairs to avoid being caught. He leaned closer. "What did you think when you saw it?"

"I was touched that you had kept it," she said. "And that you had brought it with you. Then I felt a bit guilty because all my pictures of you had been shoved in the back of a closet. I only just took them back out."

He nodded, understanding her feelings. "You probably didn't want to be reminded of me when you thought I had left you and our daughter."

"Pretty much," she admitted. "I also didn't want Sophie to find your picture and start asking difficult questions I didn't want to answer just yet. I guess I was a coward."

"You were a mother protecting her daughter. You did what you believed you had to. There's nothing cowardly in that." He wrapped his fingers around her hand.

She squeezed back, smiling at him. "Thank you. I think I needed to hear that."

"I will tell you that you are an amazing mother as often as you need to hear it," he vowed.

"Roland told me that when I'm here, he feels like he has a mother," she admitted, tears filling her eyes.

Surprise filled Robin, which caught him off-guard. He had suspected that Roland's desire to be around Regina as much as possible was tied to the lack of a maternal figure in his life. Roland had never asked where his own mother was and Robin tried to make up for the lack of one. However, it didn't surprise Robin that Roland would gravitate toward Regina. She had already interacted with him in a maternal way and was his sister's mother. No doubt in Roland's mind, that also made her his mother.

He didn't mind it at all.

"Robin? Are you okay?" she asked, concerned.

"Yes," he said, scooting back onto the bed. "I'm glad Roland has you in his life now. Maybe that's why I was going to come find you after Marian left."

"So I could be a mother to your son?" Regina raised her eyebrow as it hit him how that sounded.

He shook his head. "That didn't come out right. I wanted someone I knew would love him with her whole heart and do everything to make sure he was happy. Someone who would be an equal in parenting with me."

Regina gave him a soft smile and his heart skipped a beat. He cupped her cheek. "There's that beautiful smile I fell in love with. It haunted my dreams as I saw it every time I closed my eyes."

"I saw your dimples and blue eyes in my dreams," Regina admitted. "They always made my heart skip a beat. Even when I thought the worst of you."

He smiled, knowing his dimples were on display. Leaning in, he pressed a gentle kiss to her lips as he ran his fingers through her silky hair.

Robin began to pull away but Regina grabbed onto his shirt, pulling him back in. They kissed
passionately and she nibbled his lower lip, asking for entrance. He granted it willingly, letting her tongue sweep his mouth as they fell back onto the mattress.

They shifted so he was almost on top of her, hands roaming her body over her pajamas. She dug her fingers into his hair as their tongues continued to duel, the room growing hotter despite the AC being on. Or perhaps that was their bodies.

She broke the kiss, rubbing her nose with his. "Why don't you turn off the lights?"

"Why?" he asked, panting.

"More romantic. And we won't have to worry about it later," she replied in between kissing his neck.

Robin frowned, though. "I…I don't think we're ready for sex yet, Regina."

"I agree," she said, pulling away. "Doesn't mean we can't make out like randy teenagers in the dark before falling asleep."

"Did you just say randy teenagers?"

She rolled her eyes. "Turn the lights off, Locksley, before I change my mind."

He grinned, doing just as she instructed. Once the room was plunged into darkness, Regina grabbed his shirt and pulled him back to her again. Their lips reconnected and hands continued to roam over their bodies, getting reacquainted once again.

As Regina's hand cupped his ass, Robin smiled against her lips. This wasn't how he planned to spend his Saturday night but now he couldn't imagine doing anything else but kissing the woman he loved.

Warm sunshine woke Sophie in the morning and she stretched out in bed, chasing away the last remnants of sleep. Her door creaked open and she looked up to find her father standing there, smiling when he saw she was awake. "Want to help me make breakfast for everyone?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, pushing back the blankets. She climbed down from the bed and took his hand.

"Can we make pancakes?"

"Of course. And as you know, I've got chocolate chips this time. Pulp free orange juice too," he said, swinging her arm.

She giggled, feeling like she was at home now. "Thank you, Daddy."

"Anything for you," he replied, stopping to rub her arms. "I want you to feel the same way you do at home with your mom when you're with me. I just want you to be happy."

"I am happy. I have you." She hugged him, hearing his heart beat as she pressed her ear against his chest.

He hugged her close, letting her smell his now familiar pine scent as he cupped her head with one hand and rubbed her back with the other. "I'm happy I have you too. So very, very happy," he whispered.

She pulled back a bit, smiling up him. "Can we make those pancakes now?"
"Of course," he said, taking her hand. He led her into the kitchen and pulled out a stepstool for her. "Hop up and I'll get the ingredients."

"I don't think I need this," she said, pointing to the stepstool. She already could see over the counter.

He sighed. "Probably not. But humor your old man and pretend you're still small enough to need it. Please?"

"Okay, Daddy." She climbed onto the counter, towering over it. But she still smiled, looking at him. "How's this?"

"Perfect." Robin placed all the ingredients down before pulling out a bowl. "Let's make the best pancakes ever."

Sophie laughed as she and her father put in the ingredients together. He let her operate the mixer, though he held onto her hands to keep them steady as they mixed the batter together. Robin then took out the chocolate chips as well as his griddle. "Time to cook these!" he announced.

"Can I flip them?" she asked.

He nodded. "Once again, only if I help you. Otherwise, I'm sure your mother will have my head."

"Why would I have your head?" Regina wandered into the kitchen, a sleepy Roland resting on her hip. He rubbed his eye as she leaned forward, giving Robin a quick kiss.

He hummed before opening his eyes. "If I didn't make sure Sophie was absolutely safe while using the stove."

"Ahh," she said, nodding. "Damn right I would."

She moved around Robin, kissing Sophie's cheek. "Good morning, darling."

"Good morning, Mom. Good morning, Roland." She tried to kiss her brother's cheek but Roland turned his face away, burying it in the crook of her mother's neck.

Robin chuckled. "He's not much of a morning person."

"I can tell," Regina replied, rubbing Roland's back. "I'm sure he'll come around once you and Sophie actually start making those pancakes."

"Right!" Robin turned back to Sophie. "Can you hand me the butter? We'll get this pan good and ready for the most delicious chocolate chip pancakes ever."

"Chocolate chip?" Roland raised his head, his eyes wide and alert as he smiled at everyone. "That sounds amazing!"

They all laughed and Sophie watched as her father buttered up the griddle. He then helped her pour some of the batter onto it and guided her hand as she flipped them over once one side was golden brown. "You're doing a great job," he praised her.

Regina set Roland down at the table before going to pour him some orange juice. "There's no pulp in there for Sophie," Robin told her as she passed by them. "You can take that out as well."

"What do you want?" she asked, opening the refrigerator. "Orange juice or coffee?"

"Coffee will be fine," he replied, helping Sophie put the pancakes on a plate. He kissed the back
of her head. "Time for the next batch."

They poured more batter onto the griddle together as Regina started some coffee for her and Robin. Roland, now more awake, began chattering excitedly about everything he wanted to do that day and they all nodded.

Looking up at her father, Sophie smiled. While she and her mother had had such fun mornings together as well, she had still wondered what it would be like to have a family like the ones she saw on TV—mom, dad, siblings. Now she had it and she realized it was just as wonderful as she hoped.

She leaned against her father, enjoying the love and warmth radiating off him. Everything about this morning with her family was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

Look! An update to this story only about a month after the last! The Locksley-Mills family is starting to solidify a bit more, though they might start to face some challenges soon.

It's April 18th, so happy birthday to Sean and to Robin in this story!

-Mac
Chapter 10: A Brief Stumble

Regina looked up as Ruby entered the room, smiling. "I think I've found some great ideas for your vacation with Sophie this summer. Or should I be planning for four?"

"Just two," Regina confirmed. "Robin only just walked back into my life. I don't think we're ready for a vacation together just yet."

"If you say so," Ruby replied, placing some pamphlets down on Regina's desk. She placed her hands behind her back. "Anything else?"

Picking up the pamphlets, Regina shook her head. "Thank you for doing this, Ruby. I'll let you know which one Sophie and I pick."

Ruby nodded before leaving Regina alone. Sighing, the mayor leaned back in her chair as she went through the pamphlets to find the perfect vacation for her and her little girl this year.

She glanced over at the pictures on her desk, showing Sophie growing up over the years. But the biggest picture now was the one from the Summer Festival Ball. It was one Ruby had taken, sometime after Regina and Robin kissed. The two of them had their arms wrapped around each other as well as Sophie, who stood in front of them. All three beamed at the camera.

Regina reached over and picked it up, running her fingers over Robin's smiling face. Even though it had only been a few weeks since he had walked back into her life, she almost felt like he hadn't left. They just clicked once again and he had integrated himself into Sophie's life well. She had obviously done the same with Roland since the little boy was already attached to her. They were a family but she had to admit she wasn't ready to vacation like one, but only because she wanted one more trip that was just her and her little girl before they did become a family of four for good.

Her phone buzzed and she set the picture down, picking it up. "Ruby? Is something wrong?"

"There's a Keith Nott for you," her assistant said.

Regina sat up straighter, already going on guard. "Tell him we have no business and he can kindly leave."

"Will do," Ruby replied before hanging up the phone. Regina, though, didn't relax and decided to wait five minutes. She would then call her assistant back to make sure Keith left.

She didn't have to wait five minutes. Her door flew open only two minutes later and Keith strode in, a scowling Ruby on his heels. "You can't just barge into the mayor's office!" she exclaimed.

"Ruby, call security please," Regina said, keeping her eyes on Keith's. "Also call Sheriff Swan and Deputy Nolan. Just in case."

Ruby nodded, her heels clicking on the marble floor of the mayor's office as she hurried back to her desk. She kept the door open, no doubt ready to step in if Regina needed help.

"Keith, what are you doing here?" Regina asked. "What is so important that you had to break
"Locksley," he said and she rolled her eyes. He scowled as he continued: "You're really making that mistake again?"

She sat down, crossing her arms. "Robin has never been a mistake and it's none of your business. I turned you down."

"Yes, you did. And look where that got you. You're a single mother." The way he spat out that last sentence made her blood boil.

Regina leaned forward, glancing at the picture. "My life is not yours to judge. I don't appreciate you coming in here and doing that. What goes on between me and Robin is our business, not yours. And our daughter sure as hell isn't your business either."

"Ahh, there's the fire I remember from when we were younger," Keith said, smiling. "A pity you wasted it on Locksley."

"Keep telling yourself that. But I have no doubt Robin is a lot better than you in bed," she said, smiling right back at him. Two could definitely play this game.

His ears turned red and his eyes narrowed. "What is it about him? Why are you still crazy for him so many years later?"

"Why do you care so many years later?" she countered. "I thought I made it quite clear back then that my life is my own. I do not have to justify myself to you."

"I always considered you the one that got away, Regina," he replied, shaking his head as he smiled sadly.

She wanted to slap him. Maybe then it would knock some sense into him. "To be the one that got away implies you ever had a chance with me. You didn't."

He scowled again. "Because of Locksley. He swooped in and charmed you with that British accent of his."

"Robin has nothing to do with this and you know it," Regina replied. "So please leave before I have security drag you out."

Sighing, Keith stood. "I guess I should leave. No doubt you'll tell Robin about this visit and he'll make good on his threat."

That confused Regina and she frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, Locksley and I had an encounter the other day in the grocery store. He warned me to stay away from him and his own. Seems he considers you his own." Keith gave her a cold smile before sauntering past the just arrived security.

As the guards hurried after him, Ruby entered the office again. She approached Regina's desk, concerned. "Are you okay?"

"Yes," Regina said, though her thoughts were miles away. Keith's last words haunted her. Had Robin really acted so possessive of her despite knowing that she hated such behavior? He hadn't back when they were first together and she couldn't imagine him changing that much. So why would Keith say that?
"Regina!" Ruby's voice was sharp and Regina almost jumped at it. She looked up at her assistant, who was even more concerned. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Taking a deep breath, Regina nodded. "Yes, I'm sure. Thank you, Ruby."

Her assistant nodded. "I'll just go back to my desk. Call me if you need anything, okay?"

"I will," Regina promised. She gave Ruby a smile and then returned to her work, doing her best to put Keith and his words out of her mind.

Robin pulled up to Town Hall, a bouquet of yellow roses in his front seat. Will had agreed to watch both Roland and Sophie, allowing him to come surprise Regina with flowers and an invitation to dinner. He stepped out of his car, a slight bounce in his step as he entered the building.

Security stopped him, checking him out. He was compliant, not minding the procedures needed to keep everyone safe. Especially when the guard waving the wand over him explained why there was such extra precaution. "We had an incident earlier. Madame Mayor needed someone escorted out of the building."

"The mayor?" Robin frowned, lowering his arms as worry spread through him as thought of someone terrorizing Regina. "Is she alright?"

The guard nodded. "Yeah. Mr. Nott left willingly and didn't seem to hurt her in anyway."

"Mr. Nott?" The ball of dread grew in his stomach. Keith wouldn't have been so stupid, would he?

Passing security's scrutiny, Robin hurried up to the mayor's office. He spotted her young assistant, Ruby, packing up for the day. "How is she?" he called out.

Ruby sighed. "She says she's fine but she seems shaken by something. Maybe you can get more out of her."

"I'll do my best," Robin vowed, clutching the roses tighter. "Have a good night, Ruby."

"You too. Make sure Regina does as well." She winked at him before walking past him, heading out for the evening.

Robin opened the door leading into Regina's office. He saw her at her desk, white curtain billowing in the evening breeze behind her as she finished up the last of her paperwork for the day. Robin stood there, admiring how beautiful she was in the sun's dying glow and how it gave her a halo.

"Are you just going to stand there staring or are you going to come give me a kiss hello?" She capped her pen and looked up, giving him an adorable, nose-scrunching smile.

He chuckled, crossing the room in a few long strides. He stood, coming around the desk to meet him and he pulled her closed, kissing her. "Hello, beautiful."

"Hello," she replied, smiling though it didn't reach her eyes. He grew confused as she looked down at his other hand. "Are those for me?"

"Yes." He handed her the yellow roses, still studying her. What the hell had Keith Nott done?
She tilted her head and frowned. "They told you about Keith."

He nodded. "Care to tell me what happened?"

"He paid me a little visit," she said. "Seems he might have lingering feelings for me."

"Even after I warned him," Robin replied, shaking his head.

That appeared to be the wrong thing to say. Regina's body went rigid and there was a fire in her eyes when she spun to face him. "And what was that warning about?"

He frowned, stepping back. "Just that he should think twice before messing with you."

"Because I'm yours?" she asked, crossing her arms as she glared at him.

"What?" He grew confused, shaking his head. "Not at all. I told him that between you, Emma and Mal, I was pretty certain no one would ever find the body. He'd be barmy to cross you. Clearly, he underestimates what a force you really are."

Her eyes remained narrowed as she looked him over, stepping closer. "So you didn't tell him to stay away from you and your own?"

"I did," he replied, "but I was clear that I meant the children, not you. I don't want him around Sophie and Roland and I will do whatever it takes to keep them safe."

Robin held her gaze. He wasn't going to back down from his belief about his children and who he wanted around them. Several long seconds stretched between them before Regina nodded. "Agreed."

He let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding before frowning again. "Did you really think I would act all possessive of you and act like you were some damsel in distress, even knowing how much you hate that?"

Regina's shoulders sagged and guilt filled her eyes. "I didn't want to. But Keith…I don't know. He had me doubting you. I'm sorry."

"I forgive you," he said, rubbing her arms. "We're still getting to know each other again."

She sighed. "I should've trusted you and not let Keith get to me, though."

He pulled her close. "Let's forget about Keith. I've pressed Will into babysitting our children and plan to take you for a nice dinner. How does that sound?"

"It sounds nice," she said, though her voice lacked any real conviction.

Robin stepped away, looking her in the eyes. Or tried to, as she kept avoiding his. "Regina? What's wrong?"

She sighed. "I shouldn't have let Keith do that. What does that say about me? About us?"

"Regina…" he started before stopping. He held out his hand. "Come on. Why don't we go to your house? I'll cook us dinner and we can talk. How does that sound?"

"That sounds okay," she said, taking his hand. "I think talking will be good."

Regina changed from one of her suits when she got home. She heard Robin rattling around her
kitchen as she pulled on a pair of jeans and a nice red silk top, touching up her makeup. Even if it was at a date in her house, it was still a date and she wanted to look nice for it.

She also wanted the confidence her reddest lipstick gave her. Keith had shaken her and she was upset that she had let him. That she hadn't trusted Robin, that she hadn't just dismissed his words for what they ended up being—nothing but a ploy to drive a wedge between her and Robin.

"Regina? Are you okay?" Robin called up from downstairs.

She sighed, stepping out of her room. "Yes. I'm on my way down."

He stood at the foot of her stairs, frowning. "You're still thinking about Keith, aren't you?"

"Is it obvious?" she asked, coming down the stairs. "I hate that he's done this to me. I hate him."

"Forget him," Robin insisted. "The more time you waste thinking of him gives him a victory over us. Let's not let him have it."

She sighed, running a hand through her hair. Her frustration grew as she tried to figure out how to best explain it to him. "I know, I know. But he had me doubting you. I shouldn't be doing that."

"Why?" Robin asked and she thought he had lost his mind.

Regina pulled back, frowning. "Because I love you. Because you love me. People who love each other shouldn't doubt each other."

He sighed this time, shaking his head. "That's a bit over simplistic, yeah? Besides, why wouldn't you doubt me? We only just walked back into each other's lives."

"But you've proven that you hadn't changed so much that you would then treat me like a possession when you never have before," she replied, voicing what truly frustrated her. That she would think the worse of him so easily shook her to her core.

"Come on," he said, tugging her hand toward her kitchen table. He pulled out a chair and urged her down. "Do you want some tea?"

She glanced up at him, chuckling. "Do you know how British that question is?"

He shrugged. "I am still British, Regina. And there is still great comfort in a good cuppa."

"Well, I guess it couldn't hurt," she said, leaning back. She watched him as he put over her teapot and pulled out two mugs.

As he waited for the water to boil, he turned to face her again. "Do you think we should go to couples' therapy?"

That surprised her and she was glad she wasn't drinking the tea yet. She was sure she would've choked. "What?"

"I know it's early, but you're right. We do have issues we need to work through," he said, sitting next to her. He took her hand. "I'm willing to do that. I'm committed to this relationship, Regina. I love you and don't want to lose you again."

She melted looking into his gaze, knowing he meant every word. And she knew she felt the same way. Giving his hand a squeeze, she nodded. "Maybe couples' counseling will help. We can talk to Dr. Hopper about some sessions."
"He's a marriage counselor?" Robin asked, raising an eyebrow.

"He does everything," she replied, shrugging. "Small town."

Robin chuckled, kissing her hand. "Okay. Now, the kettle is about to whistle. I'll go get the mugs."

She grinned as she turned back to the stove, turning off the burner the kettle was on and removing it. Robin stood beside her, pulling two mugs from the cabinet over the stove. "There are teabags in the one next to it," she told him.

"I got them," he said, pulling down the box. He studied it with a frown. "We need to get you some proper tea, sweetheart."

"Are you really insulting my tea choices?" she asked, turning to face him with the kettle. She raised her eyebrow.

He shook his head. "Not at all. I'm just saying I would like to expand your tastes when it comes to tea."

"Well, we can discuss that in therapy," she sassed him, pouring the hot water into the two mugs.

Robin laughed, kissing her cheek. She relaxed, feeling much better than she had when they got home. It made her believe they could truly make it.

Sophie hopped out of her Uncle Will's car and rushed up the stairs as he got Roland out of his booster seat. After spotting both her parents' cars in the driveway, she first knocked. When no one answered, she reached into her bag and pulled out her key to the house, opening the door. "Mom? Daddy?" she called out. "You two here?"

Receiving no response, she checked the kitchen. It was empty and she frowned, deciding to check the living room next. She peered cautiously around the couch, remembering the time she caught her parents making out there and not wanting a repeat of that.

Instead, she found them asleep on the couch. Her father was flat on his back while her mother was curled against him, pressed between his side and the back of the couch. She rested her head on his chest while he had an arm wrapped around her. Two empty mugs sat on the coffee table.

"Papa and Ms. Regina are napping," Roland said, holding Will's hand. "What now?"

"Should we wake them?" Sophie asked.

Will shook his head. "Not yet. They deserve to get some rest. I was going to order us something anyway, so we'll just order for them as well and wake them when it comes."

He led Roland out of the living room but Sophie lingered behind for a few more moments. She watched her parents sleep, imprinting the cozy scene on her memory. Each new experience with her parents together was thrilling and she wanted to remember them all, hoarding them like a treasure.

"Sophie?" Will called. "Are you coming?"

She skipped out of the room, smiling as she recalled how her mother burrowed deeper between the couch and Robin. Entering the kitchen, she stopped in front of Will. "Yes, Uncle Will?"
He smiled at her, holding some papers in his hand. "Your brother and I need some help choosing a place to order from. We figured we could use your expertise."

"Okay," she said, sitting down. "Though Mom and I don't order out much. She prefers to cook for us."

Will chuckled. "That sounds like Regina to me. She often insisted on making dinners for us back at the beach."

"Cool. Will you tell me more about that summer, Uncle Will?" Sophie asked, eager to know all she could about her parents when they were younger.

"I would love to," he said before pushing the menus closer to her. "Once you help us pick a place to order from."

She laughed, looking them over. Biting her lip, she tapped on the Dragon's Fortune menu. "It's been a while since we've had Chinese. This place makes the best eggrolls."

Will grinned, picking up the menu. "Then we're going to call the Dragon's Fortune. Um, do you know your mother's usual order?"

The smell of lo mein woke Robin. His stomach growled and hunger pangs hit him as he roused, noting the fading light in Regina's living room. She slept on, though, curled against his chest and he was loathed to move, afraid he might wake her up.

Yet his stomach growled again and he almost groaned from the pangs. Robin knew he needed to eat and prayed Regina would understand as he slid out from under her. He pulled down a blanket covering the back of the couch and placed it over her, almost tucking her in like she was Sophie or Roland. Robin kissed her forehead and she slept on.

He followed the smell of the food into the kitchen, smiling when he saw Will sitting between Sophie and Roland. Roland was eagerly eating beef lo mein while Sophie worked on sesame seed chicken. Will bit into an eggroll and Robin watched his friend's eyes go wide as he chewed. Once he swallowed, he turned to Sophie. "You were right. These are the best eggrolls."

"Mom and I know are egg rolls," she bragged, taking one for herself. She then spotted Robin and her eyes lit up. "Daddy!"

It was a beautiful sound and Robin's heart skipped a beat as he approached his daughter. He dropped a kiss into her hair. "Hello, sweetheart. Enjoying your dinner?"

She nodded and Roland bounced up and down in his chair. "We got you beef lo mein too, Papa!"

"Looks delicious," he said, eyeing the meal as his stomach rumbled. "Let me grab a plate and I'll be right there."

"What about Ms. Regina?" Roland asked, glancing around the corner as if expecting to find her waiting in the hallway.

Robin smiled, ruffling his curls. "She's still sleeping. She'll eat when she wakes up, even if we have to reheat everything. Okay?"

"Okay," Roland said, sounding disappointed. He looked forlorn into his meal and Robin sighed, knowing his son wanted to spend more time with Regina.
Crouching down, Robin gently turned Roland's head so his son faced him. He smiled at him. "Don't worry. You'll get to spend plenty time with her once she wakes up."

"You promise?" Roland asked.

Sophie nodded. "I'm sure Mom will want to spend lots of time with us when she wakes up."

"But what if she doesn't wake up until the morning?" Roland asked, almost in a whine. He also pouted, crossing his arms as he dropped his chin to his chest.

Robin recognized the signs of a tantrum and was about to take his son out of the room when Regina's voice drifted into the kitchen. "Is that a frown I see? What's with the sad face, Roland?"

"Ms. Regina!" He jumped up and practically pushed Robin out of the way as he hurried over to hug Regina. She held him close and he closed his eyes, smiling brightly in her arms.

"I see dinner has been taken care of," she said, giving Robin a pointed look. He held up his hands before pointing to Will.

Will held up his hands. "Hey, I said I would give your children dinner. There were no conditions regarding that. Besides, I went to your favorite place, Regina. We got eggrolls."

She seemed to perk up and Robin thought the way her eyes lit up was adorable. Biting her lip, Regina said: "Well, if you got eggrolls…"

"From Dragon's Fortune," Sophie piped up, smiling. "You know, your favorite?"

"Okay, okay. I'm sold. Let me go get a plate," Regina then kissed their daughter's head. "Save some of those chicken pieces for me, please."

Sophie nodded as Robin stood up as well. He wandered over to the cabinet, gently bumping Regina's hip with his. "Care to get me a plate as well?" he asked.

"I don't share well," she warned him and he laughed softly. "So no eggrolls for you. Or sesame seed chicken."

"Don't worry. I'm planning on splitting the beef lo mein with my son, though I daresay you'll have to sit with him," he whispered to her.

She handed him a plate and smiled at Roland. "I don't mind that. Besides, I'm sure Sophie would rather you sat next to her."

He glanced back at their daughter, who was laughing at something Will had said. It warmed his heart and he smiled happily at her. "I'd love to sit next to her. At least she'll know I won't steal her food."

"I'm not stealing her food. I asked. You wouldn't want to steal her food. If you think I'm bad, she's ten times worse," Regina warned, heading back to the table.

Robin paused before chuckling, joining the rest of their family at the table. He took some food from Roland's plate before sitting next to Sophie. "Don't worry. Your food is safe," he told her.

"Good," she said, smiling sweetly. "Then so is your hand."

He blinked a few times, hearing her mother in those words. Beside him, Regina tried to bite back her laughter but was doing a horrible job at it. Robin just turned to his own meal, a little scared of
his daughter.

Roland leaned closer to Regina, staring up at her with pure adoration. "Can we have a movie night after dinner?"

"Roland..." Robin warned, not wanting his son to get used to just inviting himself to stay over Regina's house. They were going to have to have a talk when they got home, he vowed. Roland was going to have to wait for Regina to invite them to stay.

Leaning down, Regina cupped his cheek and smiled at Roland. "I think a movie night sounds absolutely wonderful."

"Are you going to stay, Uncle Will?" Sophie asked, looking at the other man with wide eyes.

He shook his head. "Sorry, kid, but I have plans with someone else tonight."

"With Ms. Belle?" she asked sweetly.

Will nearly choked on his food and took a long chug of water. His voice sounded strained when he asked: "Why do you think that?"

"Please, Uncle Will," she said, giving him a sarcastic look. "I know you two are dating. We've seen you together in town. Holding hands, goo-goo eyes, silly smiles, the whole nine yards."

"We haven't been making goo-goo eyes and smiling is not a crime. Friends can hold hands. Don't you and Henry hold hands sometimes?" he asked, eyes not meeting Sophie's.

"We're ten," she deadpanned. Robin had to hide his snort into the rice container at how much she sounded like her mother again.

Will glared at him and then motioned to Sophie, as if he wanted Robin to get Sophie off his back. Instead, Robin leaned back with a smug smile. "So, Will, are you and Ms. Belle dating? Inquiring minds want to know."

"There are days I hate you, you know that?" Will said through gritted teeth.

Roland's head popped up and he frowned. "Hate is a bad word, Uncle Will."

The whole situation amused Robin to no end, enjoying watching his best friend squirm under the scrutiny of both his children. Unable to hide his laughter anymore, Robin gave in and let out a rather loud guffaw. Will continued to glare at him and he held up his hands. "Roland is right, Uncle Will."

"Regina," Will pleaded, looking at her with wide brown eyes. "Can you help me? Please?"

She shook her head, brown eyes sparkling with mirth. "I'm afraid not. Hate is a bad word and inquiring minds do want to know. What exactly is your relationship with our town's librarian?"

"We're trying to figure that out," he finally replied, appearing to give up. "And we would like some peace to do that. Please."

Robin felt bad as he heard the desperation in his friend's voice. He had had a front row to Will's love life for years and had seen his heart broken far too many times. They had both thought the last one was going to last but Will had gotten thrown for a loop, taking himself out of the dating pool for some time while his heart healed. If he was ready to stick his foot back in, the last thing he needed was teasing—even friendly teasing from people who loved him.
"Okay, okay," he said softly. "We'll back off. We just want you to be happy. Right, guys?"

He looked at each member of his family, who nodded in turn. Regina smiled and reached out, taking Will's hand. "Belle's a great woman, Will, and I wish you both the best."

"Thanks, Regina," he replied, squeezing her hand. "Once again, I'm really glad you've come back into my life. I missed you."

Robin leaned back in his chair, taking in the scene before him. He wished they had had this for years now, that Regina and Sophie had been in his and Will's life for the past decade like they should've been. Yet he reminded himself that there was no point in wishing. All he could do was cherish these moments now and create new memories for them to share.

"I swear I don't put my kid up to asking you to stay in order to sleep with you almost every night," Robin called out from the bedroom.

Regina chuckled as she spat out toothpaste into her sink. She rinsed off her toothbrush before rinsing out her mouth, using some mouthwash before patting her face dry. Turning off the light, she stepped into her bedroom to find Robin sitting up in bed with the sheets covering his legs. It was a good sight, she had to admit.

"I know," she assured him, climbing into bed next to him. "Besides, I like having you and Roland here. So does Sophie."

He smiled, leaning closer to her. "I love being around you and Sophie. Everything is just so much better when we're all together."

She kissed him before sliding down under her covers. He followed suit, wrapping his arms around her. "And I must admit, I do love falling asleep with you. And waking up with you."

"Me too," she said, heart beating fast. There seemed to be one particular way this conversation was going and she wondered if she was ready for it.

Robin sighed, nuzzling her hair as he gave her neck a kiss. "Can you turn off the lamp, lovely? My arms are full."

"Okay," she said, reaching out to turn off the light as her heart began to slow. Once the room was plunged into darkness, she settled into his arms with her back pressed to his front. "Good night, Robin."

"Good night, Regina. Sleep tight." He let out a loud yawn before she felt him settle down again.

Robin's breathing evened out a few minutes later but Regina's mind was spinning. She did love being in his arms again and perhaps it was just the rush of new(ish) love, but she felt she slept better with him beside her. Regina also enjoyed spending her days and nights with him and Roland. Together with Sophie, they were a family and the house felt fuller than ever.

However, a thought niggled at her now. She knew Robin was looking at a more permanent residence in Storybrooke and she was wondering if he and Roland should just move in with her. They were trying to take it slow but her heart told her that it was going to happen eventually. Why have him waste money on renting a house he was going to spend maybe 50 percent of his time in, if that?

She rolled over, lying on her side to study Robin. He looked peaceful as he slept, his lips curved into a tiny smile. She watched as his chest rose and fell in a steady rhythm, pressing her hand to it...
to feel his heart beat under her palm. It felt so good to be so close to him again.

Were they ready to move in together? Or would it be too soon? Would it doom them to take that step before they were ready? Could she chance losing him again?

Her mind returned to their fight earlier and she rested the urge to sigh. Perhaps that was proof it was too soon for them to move in together, not if they were talking couples' counseling. Of course, it wasn't because they were broken. They were mature enough to acknowledge they needed help to make sure they succeeded as a couple. No doubt one part of that was not to rush things, like moving in together too soon.

Yet she really liked having him here…

"What's wrong, lovely?" he asked, voice already thick from sleep. "I can feel you staring."

"Nothing. Just thinking," she said.

He hummed, rubbing her back. "About what?"

"Just how good this feels." She tucked her head under his chin, sighing as she rested her head against his chest. This time, she could listen to his heartbeat rather than just feel it.

His warmth wrapped around her as he began to card his fingers through her hair. Robin kissed her forehead. "This does feel good. Remember the first time we fell asleep together? After that movie marathon in my apartment?"

She chuckled as her fingers closed around his t-shirt, much like she had done that night all those years ago. "Of course I remember. How can I forget? You tried to get me to see the appeal of Monty Python."

"Let me guess. You still don't get it."

"Nope," she said laughingly. "The only thing I really remember from the movies is when we found that kid that looked like you."

He chuckled. "That was quite bizarre, wasn't it? I even asked my parents once if I might've had a cousin that was in the movie but they didn't think so."

She hummed, closing her eyes as she breathed in his familiar pine scent. It soothed her and brought her back to that night on his lumpy couch, a blanket his gran had knitted covering them since Will always had the AC on the full blast at all hours of the day. His heartbeat had filled her ear like it did now, lulling her to sleep. When she had next awoken, it was well after midnight and Robin insisted that even though she lived downstairs, it was too late for her to go home. Not that it took much on his part to get her to agree to borrow an oversized shirt from him and spend the rest of the night curled up with him in his bed.

It had been one of the most restful nights of her life.

Robin rubbed her back as he kissed her forehead. "I did ruin things in the morning though. My culinary skills were definitely nothing to brag about back then."

"No, they weren't," she agreed, remembering the smoke-filled kitchen and the charred remains of what was supposed to be an omelet. They had ended up going to eat at the nearby diner instead.

"I've gotten better," he continued.
She nodded, whispering: "I will deny it if you say it to anyone else, but you make pancakes better than I do."

"Truly a compliment." He nuzzled her hair. "Don't worry, lovely, your secret is safe with me."

"I trust you," she whispered, feeling his breathing start to even out. He was nodding off and soon would be asleep. She prayed he had heard her.

As she lay in his arms, she wondered if her idea of Robin and Roland moving in with her and Sophie was an overreaction to her earlier overreaction. Was it her guilt for not trusting in Robin, in almost believing Keith, that made her want to rush things to prove something to herself?

Robin shifted in his sleep, rolling onto his back. Missing his warmth, she adjusted herself until she was pressed against his body again. She pillowed her head on his chest and sighed, resting her hand over his heart. Everything seemed far too confusing right now, she thought. She shouldn't make such a drastic decision just yet. Instead, she would wait and discuss it with Robin after a few therapy sessions.

It seemed like a rational decision and allowed her mind to quiet down. She focused on the sound of Robin's heart and the steady rhythm of his breathing, allowing it to pull her down into dreamland with him.

Chapter End Notes

Keith is always causing trouble for our couple, isn't he? At least Robin and Regina easily straightened that out and have decided to really commit to making their relationship work. Because Keith isn't going to be their only test. But that's for another chapter.

Thanks to everyone who supported OQ Prompt Party. We definitely showed our poor fandom is not dead. You all rock!

-Mac

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