Hey, Nice To Meet You

by evilregal

Summary

“We’re almost there, Emma. You’ll see you’ll love it in Storybrooke with Mr. Nolan. David, I’m sure he’ll want you to call him David. He’s a nice man I promise. He’s one of my best friends, Emma. He works at an animal shelter…”

Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Once Upon a Time or any other copyrighted material mentioned. All mistakes are mine!

I feel like I should say I am not an English student/anything. I mean, I teach math to tiny humans while getting my masters in psychology. You get the idea? Okay!

I also don't know anything about social service. I'm googling things as I go.

On with the story then! Hope you enjoy.

See the end of the work for more notes
Milah Jones was exhausted. The last forty-eight hours had been the most stressful of her entire career, and that said a lot considering she had spent the past ten years working as a social worker in the Boston area. Nobody had warned her, during her college years, that the path she had chosen almost always led to helplessness and heartbreaks.

At twenty-four, she had been all smiles, determined to change the world, one case at a time. Now, ten years later, she had grown bitter. Her faith in humanity dwindled with each passing day. She knew now that her best efforts would most likely result in a child being placed with a decent family for a little over three months before they’d be sent back for a reason or another. Sometimes, her best efforts ended up with her, running down a hospital hallway at 5am on a Tuesday morning looking for her little Swan.

She had gotten a phone call in the middle of the night, telling her that a child had been dropped outside the ER with her card taped to her shirt. Blonde curly hair, pale skin, green eyes and between the age of four and six.

“Emma Swan,” Milah had whispered, her voice cracking with tears. “Her name is Emma Swan. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Is she allergic to anything, ma’am?”

“No, no, she’s not. Why?”

“We’d like to give her something for the pain.”

And that’s how her already broken heart had been crushed to dust.

***

She was driving on a road bordered by a lush green forest, the sun low in the horizon painted the skies in different shades of pink and purple. The car ride had been unusually quiet. Whenever Milah had to drive her somewhere, Emma would always babble in the back, asking all sorts of questions, feet swinging and kicking the driver’s seat, but not today. She had tried getting Emma to talk, but her attempts had been fruitless. The child sat still in her booster seat, staring out the window, eyes unfocused. Milah wanted to blame it on the pain medication the doctor had given her, but the truth was nobody had gotten her to say a word since she had been found. Emma hadn’t even made a sound when they had put the cast on her leg despite the tears and the obvious pain. Nobody really knew what had happened; they could only assume.

Turning down the volume of the radio, Milah tried to engage the child once more.

“We’re almost there, Emma. You’ll see you’ll love it in Storybrooke with Mr. Nolan. David, I’m sure he’ll want you to call him David. He’s a nice man I promise. He’s one of my best friends, Emma. He works at an animal shelter…”

But the little girl wasn’t listening. Her head had lolled forward, resting on the cool window. Her eyelids fluttered wildly as she fought to stay conscious.

The social worker switched the CD player on, and classical music filled the car, giving Emma the little push she needed to surrender to sleep.

***
David Nolan had been best friend with Milah’s husband since they were little boys, playing by the docks. His wife, Kathryn, had passed away a few years ago, and he was only starting to live again. Killian had joked one night, after one too many drinks, that David should consider adopting ‘Milah’s kids’; it wouldn’t be too different from his current job at the shelter and it would keep him busy 24/7. They had all laughed it off, but a couple of days later, David had called her and asked what it would take to foster a child, and if she thought he had what it took to do it.

“David, we both know you’d be a wonderful father,” she had said.

After making sure he was serious and thinking it over, Milah had called him back saying she had the perfect child for him if he was certain and ready. A little girl who had just turned six years old and who was in desperate need of a stable loving home. She had emailed him all the paperwork and after that it was just a game of waiting.

It hadn’t been easy to persuade her boss to let her take Emma to Storybrooke, Maine, but the last incident with the Michaels had finally been enough for her to agree.

They all wanted the best for Emma Swan.

***

When she arrived, David was waiting for them, sitting on the porch step of his modest cottage, his knees bouncing anxiously. He quickly jumped to his feet when he saw Milah’s car pulling in his driveway and he waved at her.

She shut off the engine and got out, happy to finally be able to stretch.

“God, David, why do you have to live so far into the woods. I swear the drive gave me leg cramps.”

“Hey, Milah!” he greeted, a nervous smile playing on his lips. “It wouldn’t be so bad if you got a decent car. How is this thing still even moving?”

“There’s nothing wrong with my bug!” she stated with a light punch on his shoulder, before pulling him into a hug. “Thank you so much for taking her in, David. You are a lifesaver, literally.”

Sensing his friend was on the verge of tears he gave her a little squeeze and stroked her back gently.

“I’m more than happy to.” Milah step away and offered him a wet smile. “So, how is she?”

“I don’t know… It’s the first time I see her like this. She usually bounces back pretty quickly, but… She refuses to talk. We don’t know what they did to her, David,” Milah said, biting her bottom lip.

She felt guilty. She knew she never should have left Emma go with these people, even if it was just for a week. She had had a bad feeling about the Michaels from the start, and with Emma’s past, Milah never should have taken the chance. How was Emma supposed to trust her now? How was she supposed to trust herself to do her job right?

“What did the doctor say?” David asked. His eyes were warm with empathy, but Milah could see the sadness in them.

“Broken leg, severe bruising on her arms, back and legs. They’ve beaten her up pretty bad,”
Milah said, her eyes filling with tears.

“Christ, how can someone do that to a child? To anyone?” David shook his head in disgust. They stayed silent for a while, both lost in their thoughts.

“Well, should we bring her things inside then? It’s getting chilly out here.”

“She doesn’t have much. Just a backpack I filled with brand new clothes yesterday. You should be good for a little while. She might need a warmer jacket for the winter, but you’ll have gotten the first check by then. Her stuff is on the passenger seat.”

“You know I don’t need the money, Milah,” David said as he walked around the car.

“Yeah, I know Mister ‘I’m loaded but I live like a peasant.’” They both chuckled.

“I don’t live like a peasant. I just like simple things. I don’t need money to be happy. Hey, should I bring the crutches inside too?”

“Please. I don’t think she’ll use them anytime soon. She’s been pretty lethargic. Doctor says it’s due to the pain medication they’ve put her on.”

“You don’t believe them?”

“I don’t believe it’s the only reason. They were pretty anxious to release her when they learned she’s a state ward.”

David nodded his understanding as he shut the door softly, mindful of the sleeping child in the backseat, and Milah couldn’t help but smiled at his attention. David Nolan would be good for Emma, but she had a feeling Emma would be even better for him. He needed a little bit of love in his life again, and Emma Swan had plenty to offer.

Milah watched as he walked back to the house, wearing the Disney backpack on his shoulder proudly. She didn’t know how she would ever pay him back for the chance he was giving Emma.

Taking a deep breath, the woman opened the car door, pushed the seat forward and bent slightly in front of the sleeping girl.

“Emma, hey Emma, we’re here, love,” she whispered softly, gently rubbing circles on the back of the child’s tiny hand.
Emma jolted awake in her seat and couldn’t help the low pained moans that escaped her lips. Her eyelashes fluttered as she fought back the drowsiness. Her entire little body hurt and her head felt weird. It was heavy and everything around her was spinning and blurry. She didn’t understand why she was feeling woozy, and it scared her. Her heart raced, and she pulled at her jacket clumsily, trying to loosen it so she could breathe better.

“Emma?” Milah whispered softly. She could tell the little girl wasn’t fully aware of her surroundings and it tugged at her heart to see her so confused. “You’re okay, love. You’re safe.”

Her head snapped up upon hearing Milah’s calm voice, and green mossy eyes locked onto soft caramel ones. The woman stroked her cheek as she hummed a lullaby, waiting for the little girl to wake up properly.

Slowly, Emma’s eyes lost their glaze, but her features remained emotionless.

“We’re here, love,” the social worker repeated gently. “Did you have a good nap?”

Remembering she was being taken to yet another family, her eyes filled with tears she refused to shed. She didn’t want to meet this new man. Why couldn’t she go back to Milah’s home? Wasn’t she good enough? She had spent a night over once, and it was the best day of her life. Why couldn’t she have that every day? Was she so bad that nobody wanted her? She didn’t know what she had done wrong.

Milah’s question went unanswered, but the social worker kept talking, hoping it would help Emma relax.

“Are you ready to come inside? I think you are due for another round of medication, yes? Are you hurting, love?”

Emma blinked at her, but stayed silent. She wanted to say no. She didn’t want to go inside. But she couldn’t speak. Every time she had tried to talk since she had been left at the ER, the words would get stuck in her throat, making it hard to breathe or swallow.

“David is waiting for us inside. He cannot wait to meet you,” Milah went on with a smile. “I’ve known him for a long time. He’s really charming, you’ll like him. Did you know he’s Killian’s best friend? You remember my husband right?”

Emma nodded slowly. She did remember him. He had bright blue eyes and a kind smile. He had carried her on his shoulders on their way back from the park, and they had stopped to get ice cream. It had been the best sundae Emma had ever had and the biggest too.

“If you liked Killian, you’re going to love David, and he’s pretty impatient to meet you!”
Milah unbuckled the girl and, careful not to jostle her too much, she lifted her out of the car and carried her to the house. Emma buried her face in her shoulder, and Milah could feel the warm tears trickle down her neck and into her shirt as the little girl cried silently.

She cradled Emma’s head with her free hand and closed her eyes, willing her own tears to recede.

“Listen to me carefully, love,” Milah whispered directly into her ear. She had stopped right outside the front door with Emma balanced on one hip.

“I promise you, Emma, this is the last foster home I’m taking you to. If you do not like it here with David, I will quit my job, and Killian and I will do everything we can to adopt you. But you have to give it a fair chance, love. Can you do that for me?”

She felt the child nod against her shoulder, and Milah rested her forehead on top of Emma’s head. She knew she had no right to ask Emma to trust her. Not after what had happened to her, but she would never ever lie to her about something like that. She had already talked to her husband about it. They could afford her taking a few months off work if it meant finally giving the girl the family she truly deserved, but she had no qualms about leaving her with David. Milah knew he truly was a good man.

“I love you, little Swan.”

Emma stayed quiet, but she tightened her hold around Milah’s neck. She did love her too; Emma just couldn’t say it right now, even if she wanted to.

Milah knocked to let David know they were coming in, before pushing the door open.

‘Here we go,’ she thought.

***

David was waiting for them, pacing in his living room. When Milah and Emma didn’t come in right away, he started doubting himself once more, questioning whether or not he could really do this. He had never taken care of a child before, and from what Milah had said, he had no room for error with Emma. She had been let down so many times before in her short life. He stared at the sad-looking, tiny crutches propped on the wall in front of him, and his heart swelled with a newfound determination. He would have to do this. It was too late to back out. No matter what happened, he wouldn’t let this little girl down. He would show her how beautiful this world was, just like his mother had shown him, once upon a time.

He heard a sharp knock and sucked in a breath.

‘Here we go,’ he thought.

***

Milah came in with the girl in her arms. He couldn’t tell if Emma was asleep or not. She had an arm thrown around the social worker’s neck, and the other was dangling limply by her side. Her hair was disheveled; longish and wavy. David thought it could use a good brushing – though in light of the past forty-eight hours’ events, combing out tangles had surely been the last thing on their minds. She was wearing a red faux-leather jacket that seemed a bit too big on her and royal blue sweatpants, probably to accommodate the cast on her leg. She only had one shoe one, and a thick white sock covered her casted foot.

“Everything okay?” David mouthed.
The woman nodded tightly. She rubbed slow circles on the little girl’s back as she walked into the living room. She sat down on the couch and rearranged Emma on her lap so her left leg would be stretched out in front of her. The little girl scrunched up her face in discomfort, but didn’t complain. Milah smoothed blonde hair away from her face and immediately noticed how pale Emma looked.

“You doing okay there, love? Feeling sick?”

Emma shook her head slowly. She didn’t feel sick, but her leg hurt so badly – her whole body really – it took her breath away. She didn’t remember being in so much pain in her life. She wanted to scream until someone would make it go away, but screaming and crying would only make it worse.

‘Make a sound and see what happens to you, you stupid brat,’ Michael had threatened her in his drunken state.

A shiver ran down her spine and she instinctively screwed her eyes shut, pushing the memory away. Feeling Emma tense against her, Milah wrapped her arms around the child and rubbed her stomach soothingly like she had done so many times at the hospital.

“Emma, this is David,” she introduced. “David, this is Emma Swan.”

“Hi there, Emma,” David greeted her warmly, kneeling in front of them to be at eye level with the child.

The little girl peered at him shyly, but didn’t say anything, not that Milah was surprised. She was just glad Emma seemed to be a little more responsive than she had been a few hours ago.

“You’ll have to excuse, Emma,” Milah unnecessarily apologized, “she’s feeling quite a bit under the weather today, right love?” She was trying to put the little girl at ease. She didn’t want Emma to feel pressured, or more uncomfortable than she clearly already was.

“Of course, I’m really sorry you are feeling bad, Emma. I hope you feel better soon.” He smiled at her, his hand hovering for a moment over her good leg, but he awkwardly withdrew it, unsure if the contact would be welcomed.

The adults exchanged a heavy look that went unnoticed by the girl. Emma was pulling at her jacket frantically again, alerting the social worker that something was wrong. The brunette unzipped the little jacket, and the girl clumsily shrugged it off only to claw at her shirt.

“Love? Emma, you’re okay, baby,” Milah reassured, covering Emma’s hands with her own and gently brushing her thumbs over her knuckles. “David could you get her medicine, please? It’s in the front pocket of her backpack, one of the syringes with a blue sticker on.”

“Yes, of course.” He stood up quickly and disappeared in the kitchen where he had left Emma’s things.

***

Walking back into the living room, David pulled the needleless syringe’s cap and handed it to Milah. She didn’t take it however and signaled for him to give it to Emma. The little girl was ferociously independent and she hadn’t, not even once, let Milah help push the plunger for her.

He crouched once again in front of Emma and passed it on to her. She grabbed it with a shaking hand and brought it to her mouth, making a disgusted face in anticipation of the vile taste of the syrup.
“I brought you something to drink,” David said, waving the juice box in the air. “I hope you like fruit punch. It’ll help mask the bad taste I think.”

Emma offered him a semblance of a smile; strained, but sincere. Both Milah’s and David’s heart lifted, relieved that the little girl seemed to still be willing to trust a stranger after what she had just been through.

“You remember what the doctor told you, love? You might feel really, really sleepy in a little while, but it’s normal. It just means the medication is doing its job and it’ll make you hurt less.”

Emma nodded and leaned back against Milah, feeling spent. She drained her juice, squishing the box to make sure she got the last drop of fruit punch and handed it back to David.

After that, the three of them sat on the couch, and the adults made small talk as Emma processed her new surroundings.

***

“Well, how about you take us on the grand tour of the house, Mr. Nolan?” Milah asked playfully as their conversation winded down. “Careful, love, we’re getting up!”

Emma’s arms shot up and she wrapped them around the woman’s neck tightly.

“Right this way, if you’ll follow me, ladies,” he quipped with a bow.

Milah chuckled, and Emma perked up with interest. David was funny. He had soft blue eyes and a nice comforting smile. He didn’t seem mean and didn’t smell bad like her previous foster dad. In fact, his whole house smelled nice, like flowers, and everything looked new and cozy. Perhaps she would be treated nicely here. Milah knew him… He was her friend…

The cottage wasn’t that large. It was a one-story house, and for the first time, David was grateful for it. He didn’t know how long Emma would have to wear her cast, but she definitely couldn’t be climbing stairs in her condition.

They went around the living room and the kitchen quickly. David led them down the hall and pointed to the bathroom. Milah spotted a pink step stool by the sink she was sure hadn’t been there the last time she was around. With such short notice, her friend had tried to make his home kids friendly. With expert eyes, she had noticed the new Disney movie collection, the colourful magnets on his fridge and the funny looking nightlights plugged in every single room they step in.

David stopped in front of a closed door and turned around looking unsure. He raked his fingers nervously through his short sandy hair and cleared his throat.

“So, um…this is going to be your room, Emma,” he announced, gesturing toward the room. “Now, I know it’s pretty bare, and you will probably hate it, but I was waiting for you to pick the colors and everything. I want this to be your very own room.”

Emma raised her head from Milah’s shoulder and stared at him curiously. Nobody had ever suggested she could decorate her room. She actually never had her own bedroom before. She either had to share, or she slept on a pull-out couch.

Sensing David’s discomfort, the woman step forward and rested a hand on his shoulder reassuringly.

“I’m sure it’s a nice room, and Emma will be happy here. Let’s take a look,” she said. Milah had
already seen the guest room and she didn’t know why David was so worried about it.

He nodded and pushed the door open. The room was painted a light shade of baby blue, and the frames around the two large windows were a shade darker. There was a white wrought iron bed with an old quilt and a small nightstand beside it. A white desk was pushed against the wall under one of the large windows with a view on the backyard and the surrounding woods. A mismatched dresser and an antique rocking chair were on the other side of the room.

***

Emma held her breath as the door slowly swung open to reveal the bedroom. She didn’t know what she was expecting, but it wasn’t what she saw. Her jaw dropped and she gasped. Her green eyes suddenly wide and alert filled with tears. This was way too much.

“Like I said, Emma, don’t worry, we’ll redecorate to your liking,” David muttered, embarrassed when he saw the glisten of tears in the little girl’s eyes.

“It’s perfect, David. Believe me, she loves it.”

The child couldn’t tear her gaze off her new room. She was in absolute awe! Emma couldn’t believe this was all hers. She never had such a huge bed all to herself! Scanning the room over and over again so she could take it all in, her eyes landed on a plush elephant sitting on the rocking chair.

She wiggled as best as she could, trying to let Milah know she wanted to be put down on her feet.

“I can’t let you down without your crutches, love.”

The social worker walked into the room and asked her where she wanted to go. Emma pointed to the rocking chair and Milah immediately saw what had caught the girl’s attention. The grey stuffed toy with a green bow around its neck. Elephants were Emma’s favourite animal.

David picked it up and handed it to Emma, who was quick to grab it and squish it close to her heart.

“It’s for you,” he told her. “I saw it at the store and thought you could use a new friend. I know it’s hard to move to a new place…”

A fleeting smile crossed the girl’s face and she whispered, “Effie” so softly, they would have missed it if they weren’t paying attention.

David’s head snapped up, eyes searching for Milah’s. It was the first time he heard the girl speak, and from the look on his best friend’s face, she was just as excited about it as he was.

“Is that how you want to name her?” David asked, his voice cracking with emotion.

Emma nodded, her fingers stroking the velvety fabric of the toy with reverence.

“I think it’s a beautiful name,” he said, and Milah hummed her approval.

The girl beamed at them, a wonderful childish grin that made her green eyes sparkle. But the spark died as quickly as it ignited. Her brow furrowed in confusion, and without warning, unable to hold herself up any long, Emma’s upper body lurched forward.

Taken by surprise, the social worker almost dropped the child. David outstretched his arms to prevent her to fall.
“Whoa!” he exclaimed.

“Emma, you alright, love?” Milah asked, concerned as she brushed blonde hair out of Emma’s face.

Her head lolled from side to side feeling heavy. She couldn’t really hear what Milah was saying. Her eyelids fluttered and she fought against the urge to close them and sleep until she couldn’t anymore.

“Is she okay?”

“Yeah, I think the pain meds just kicked in. She’s going to be drowsy for a while. Ugh, I hate how they knock her out flat like that. Thankfully it’s her last day on the heavy stuff. Starting tomorrow, you can give her regular Tylenol Kids.”

***

They left Emma dozing on the couch with the television on for background noise and sat in the kitchen.

“Do you want anything to drink?” David offered.

“Just a glass of water, thanks.”

He grabbed a bottle from the fridge and uncapped it before setting it down in front of her.

“So, that went well, right? I mean, she doesn’t hate me too much, does she?” he asked as he pulled a chair to sit in front of her.

Milah smiled, shaking her head as she rummaged through her purse.

“It went really well, David, a lot better than I expected to be honest. Here, I wrote down a few things for you,” she said, pushing a piece of crumbled paper in front of him.

“I made a few calls yesterday and I got her an appointment with Dr. Hopper? He said his office was located right downtown, do you know him? I scheduled it for next Wednesday to give her time to settle down a bit. She’s never seen a therapist before, but considering what’s happened, I thought it would be a good idea.”

David nodded in understanding.

“I know him, Archie is a nice guy.”

“Good, and she has a doctor appointment at the hospital for a checkup in a week, so next Friday.”

“So they’re going to remove her cast then?”

“No, it’s got to stay on for about six to eight weeks, but she needs a follow up to make sure everything’s healing nicely. They didn’t give me the name of the pediatrician. I guess you just have to show up…”

“Wow, six weeks, that’s long, poor kid… So what were you saying about her medication earlier?” David rubbed the back of his neck absentmindedly, trying to absorb all the information at once.

“There are two syringes left with blue stickers. That’s the heavy duty painkiller. Her last dose is supposed to be before she goes to bed tonight, but the doctor gave me an extra in case she wakes
up in pain in the middle of the night. She won’t tell you if she’s hurting so you have to be on the
lookout for any symptoms. Shortness of breath, sweating and/or crying… Emma usually pulls her
hair or her clothes like she did earlier. The meds can make her lethargic, confused, moody and
nauseated.”

David took a swig of his own water, listening intently to his friend, making mental notes as she
spoke.

“The syringes with the red stickers are regular Tylenol. There’s a bottle of chewable tablets in her
bag, so you won’t have to use them. As you might have noticed, Emma’s not feeling very
talkative these days. You have to ask constantly if she’s in pain, hungry, thirsty or if she has to use
the bathroom. She’s usually very independent…”

“But these aren’t usual circumstances…” David finished for her. “I understand. Poor kid has been
through a lot. She just needs a little extra loving,” he said with a charming smile.

***

“Emma, can you sit up for me, love? I’m going to have to leave now.”

The little girl tried pushing herself up, but her movements were sluggish and uncoordinated. Milah
helped her up, propping a few throw pillows behind her back. She hated to see Emma like that,
dull-eyed and so passive.

“I’ve put my card on the fridge with my number if you need me okay? I’m going to be back on
Saturday, in just two sleeps, with Killian. The boys are going to paint your room then, so you
have to decide the colours and everything, yeah?”

Milah waited for a sign of recognition, but Emma just blinked at her. The social worker hugged
the girl as close as she dared and kissed the top of her head.

Gently, David lifted Emma in his arms, and together, they stood out on the porch and watched
until the yellow bug disappeared down the road.

***

The rest of the day went by rather uneventfully. The pair sat on the couch and finished watching
the movie that was on, waiting for the drug to wear off some and Emma to wake up fully.

“Do you like mac n’ cheese Emma?” David asked as he rose from the couch when the movie was
over.

He looked over his shoulder just in time to see her nod, a small smile stretching on her lips. When
she caught his eyes, she hid her face behind Effie the elephant shyly. David winked at her and put
the DVD back on the shelf.

“Want to watch another while I make dinner? Or you can sit in the kitchen with me.”

Emma stared at him, chewing her bottom lip. She didn’t know how to answer his question. She
opened her mouth and closed it again.

“Movie?” he asked again, waiting for a nod or a shake of the head this time.

The little girl bobbed her head. Anticipating David’s next question, she whispered, “Frozen.”

“Well aren’t you lucky, kiddo, I just picked it up this morning!”
David was humming to himself in the kitchen, busy making dinner. He was pulling pots out of cupboards, milk and butter out of the fridge, oblivious to the green pair of eyes following his every move.

As soon as her new foster dad had retreated to the kitchen, Emma had felt scared and alone. She had crawled on the other end of the couch where she could see David and observed him quietly, her gaze reverting back to the TV only when her favorite parts were on.

“Emma, do you want to eat on the couch or at the table?” David called out to her.

“Here,” she mouthed, but of course he didn’t see her from the kitchen.

He appeared in the doorway with a blue plastic bowl in one hand and a yellow cup in the other.

Emma pointed to her spot on the couch with her finger, and David understood what she wanted. He handed her the bowl of mac n’ cheese and put her cup of milk down on the side table.

Emma leaned forward with an audible pained huff and put her barely touched bowl of cheesy pasta down on the table. She kicked her good leg in front of her, frustrated with her broken one limiting her movements. The child tipped her head back on the couch and closed her eyes.

“You okay there, kiddo?”

Emma nodded, but her eyes remained shut.

“Are you done with your food? You didn’t eat much…”

“M-My…” Emma started saying, but realizing she was speaking aloud, her eyes widened in fright, and she clamped a little hand over her mouth.

It would have been quite comical if it wasn’t so sad. What had they done to that sweet child to make her so afraid of speaking up?

“Yes?” David said kindly, hoping she wouldn’t shut down. “It’s okay, Emma, you’re fine.”

The girl let her hand fall limply by her side and studied David’s features a long time before deciding he didn’t seem angry with her.

“M-My tum-tummy feels crummy,” she finally admitted with an adorable pout.

“Oy, that’s not fun. Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?” He wasn’t exactly sure what the protocol was when a child felt a little sick.

Emma shook her head ‘no’, but pointed toward the kitchen.

“My b-blanket, in m-my bag?” she stuttered, uncertain if David would really get it for her.

“Of course, princess, your blanket is coming right up!” David jumped to his feet and disappeared in the kitchen to retrieve the coveted object. He was glad Emma had deemed him safe enough to talk to him. If she could tell him what she needed, they would be okay.

When he came back into the living room, the child had curled up on her side as best as she could
with a broken leg and snuggled up with Effie. David laid the wool blanket on her, and she smiled at him sleepily.

“Th-hanks,” she said thickly before tucking her thumb in her mouth and turning her attention back to Olaf and Anna.

***

By the time the credit rolled, Emma had dozed off again. David hit ‘stop’ on the remote and sat in the semi-darkness, contemplating how to wake up the child without scaring her.

He didn’t have to think about it long; his reflection interrupted by the ringing and buzzing of his cellphone that lay on the side table.

“Hello?” David answered without looking at the caller ID.

“Hey, Charming, it’s me,” Milah’s voice replied. “How’s my little Swan, everything okay?”

David flipped the lamp on and checked on Emma to see if she was still peacefully asleep next to him.

“Everything is okay, Mil. She actually talked to me! I mean, it was only a couple of phrases, but yeah!”

Milah could tell how elated David was, and she couldn’t stop the smile that spread wide across her lips if she’d wanted to. She was so relieved to know Emma was making good progress, a few tears slipped down her cheeks as she laughed.

“That’s such great news, David! I’m so happy to hear it!”

The two of them conversed a bit longer about Emma and the upcoming weekend, before Milah passed the phone to Killian so the two men could chat a bit.

“’Heard the little Swan is settling in nicely and you are redecorating your guestroom. Milah told me she already signed me up for the painting squad,’” Killian chuckled jovially.

The men decided it would be best if David ordered the new children furniture he needed online as Emma was in no condition to go shopping, and the Jones would pick up the order on their way out of Boston. They talked happily for a while about their respective work and how their favourite sport team was fairing.

“Hey, Killian, Emma’s waking up, I have to go,” David interrupted suddenly when the girl began to stir next to him. “Tell Milah I say goodnight,” he said before hanging up.

***

David watched as Emma blinked slowly awake and tried to sit up. She looked a little dazed, unsure as to where she was. She opened her mouth and scrunched her face up.

“Are you okay, Princess?” he asked.

Startled, Emma looked at him before she rolled on her side and leaned over the edge of the couch. David watched in horror as she clutched her stomach, and her face grew a sickly shade of green.

“Emma?”

“Don’t f-feel good,” she mumbled, before bringing a hand to her mouth. Her chest heaved as she
 suppressed a gag.

Before she finished her sentence, David was already on his feet. He grabbed a plastic bag and came back just in time for Emma to empty her stomach in it.

“I…Sorry,” Emma apologized, slumping back against the cushion, tears trailing down her pale cheeks.

Checking the time, David was surprised to notice it was already past 10PM. Emma was due for her last dose of pain meds, but he wondered if giving it to her was wise considering she had just gotten sick.

“You have nothing to be sorry about, alright? It's not your fault.” David reassured her. “How about we call it a night and we go to bed, uh? How does that sound?”

***

Ten minutes later, the little girl was in bed, tucked in with Effie the elephant under her arm, and David was feeling quite proud of himself.

With his help, Emma had brushed her teeth, washed her face and taken her meds compliantly. She had, however, categorically refused to change into her pyjamas, with or without help, and for a moment David had been terrified she would have a meltdown. Her eyes had instantly flooded with tears, her breathing had picked up and she’d pulled on her hair so hard he thought she would tear it out, but the situation had been averted as soon as he’d assured her she didn’t have to change.

“Goodnight, Princess,” he whispered, stroking the side of her head with his thumb. She was already asleep.

Walking to his own bedroom, David felt confident in his ability to care for the girl. They could do this. He would give her the family she deserved.

End Notes

Feedback is always really appreciated xx

Tumblr: charmingregal

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!