

Walking Emma Home

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The van door rolled open and Danny pulled himself inside. Sitting down on the first row of seats, he gasped for breath. His mom looked into the rear view mirror at his ruddy face.

“So, how was school today?” she asked.

“Good...” Danny panted.

“What did you do today?”

“Played kickball.”

Another rough day in 6th grade, Danny’s mom thought to herself.

Danny, wiping his nose with his sleeve, asked,

“What’s for dinner?”

“I don’t know yet,” his mom answered.

“Yes!” Danny cheered to himself.

“What was that for?”

“Whenever you don’t know, that means we usually get to have cereal.”

“Okay...just don’t make that public, you hear?”

Danny laughed and looked out the window. His mom drove up next to a woman who stood waiting to cross the street with her daughter. The little girl, Emma, had blonde hair that came just to her chin. Her glasses covered most of her face. She was tiny and could have passed for a first grader.

Danny’s mom rolled the window down and waved,

“Hey Donna, how are you?”

“Oh, we are doing fine...”

Their conversation faded as Danny stared at Emma. She was the same age as he was, but she couldn’t speak.

Her mouth always hung open and her brown eyes looked lazily at the things around her. Soon, Danny’s mom laughed, saying,

“We’ll see you tomorrow!” and waved goodbye.

As Danny’s mom rolled up the window and he asked,

“What is wrong with her?”

“Emma?...She has a lot of health problems. She was born prematurely...Her heart wasn’t developed...”

“So, is that why she can’t talk?” Danny asked naively.

“All the problems she has make her a little bit slower than a normal kid.” Danny’s mom answered in the simplest way she could, reaching over to ruffle Danny’s hair.

“Oh.” Danny whispered. He watched her for as long as she was in view.

The entire ride home he was silent.

That night as Danny was supposed to be getting ready for bed, his mom found him looking at his class pictures in last year’s yearbook.

“C’mon...into bed...where is your backpack? Are your clothes ready for tomorrow?”

Danny moved slowly to his bed, keeping his eyes glued to the yearbook.

“My backpack is downstairs,” he mumbled, “And I don’t know where my black pants are.”

As he got into bed, still looking at the pictures, his mom sat on the end of his bed. She pulled the yearbook down and caught his eyes.

“Did you brush your teeth?” she asked gently.

“Yes.” He whispered looking straight back at her.

After a few seconds of silence, his mom picked up the yearbook and looked at his class picture. She asked in a wondering tone,

“What are you doing?”

“Looking at me,” he answered with a grin. Moving on to the real reason of his perusing, he said “I wanted to remember who was in my class last year.”

“Ohh...now do you remember?”

“Yes, but I didn’t remember Emma.”

His mother’s eyes glanced down at the individual pictures. She saw Emma’s picture...the same tiny girl, with the same big glasses and the same blonde hair. No smile formed on her mouth, just an open gap.

“Well, she was sort of in your class. She was in special classes like she is this year. So you probably didn’t see her very much.” Danny’s mom closed the yearbook. He still lay there with a perplexed expression.

She asked,

“Are you okay?”

“Huh? Yeah. I’m okay.” Danny answered.

“Well...Sometimes,” his mom replied, “when you can’t get something off your mind, it means that you have to do something about it.”

She turned his light off, said goodnight and soon Danny fell asleep.

The next day after school, Danny’s mom pulled into her usual spot in the parking lot. She had a pile of mail in her lap and was looking through it distractedly. Normally, Danny bounded into the car as soon as he saw his mom pull into the parking lot. Today, five minutes passed, then seven, then ten...finally Danny’s mom looked up from her pile of mail and glanced around the schoolyard.

Where is this kid? she thought to herself.

The parking lot was slowly beginning to empty itself of minivans, but there was still no sign of Danny. Getting a touch of motherly worry, she turned off the car and went looking for her boy. As she crossed the school yard, his red sweater and black pants came into view and she felt a release of tension, but her heart still pounded. His back was turned towards her and she saw a group of little boys to his left pointing and laughing. Thinking that he had gotten into trouble or gotten carried away putting on antics, she was ready to scold him for making her worry and for not hurrying up, until he turned around.

His face was serious...calm...determined. He walked toward her, his head turned to his side all the while, looking down at Emma. Her hand was in his, and like this they walked across the schoolyard. As the two of them neared Danny’s mom, who stood silently, Emma came to a stop and looked up into the eyes of Danny’s mom. This sudden stop forced Danny to look up as well at his mother, who was watching him, wondering.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Doing something about what I couldn’t get off my mind,” he answered. “I am walking my friend home.”

His mom looked somewhat surprised.

“And what about them?” she asked motioning to the boys who were making fun of the spectacle at

seeing an eleven-year-old boy holding the hand of a retarded girl.

“Yeah, yeah,” Danny said, showing that it hurt him a little, “They are still my friends too. But last night I decided that yesterday was the last day that Emma would ever feel alone.”

Danny’s mom smiled, and pulled her little boy close, hugging him. Then Danny walked Emma home.