Title: Picking Up The Pieces
Fandom: ReGenesis
Author: tj_teejay (AO3 – Tumblr – Instagram – Reddit – E-Mail)
Genre: Het
Characters/Pairings: David/Jill
Rating: PG-13
Warning: Uhm... colourful language? Can't have David without it.
Summary: After David having received bad news, Jill is there to pick up the pieces. Quite literally.
Timeline: This is set post-series, but let's please assume that Jill has found her way back to Toronto and Jill and David somehow managed to make a semblance of a relationship work.
Author's Note: Okay, so I will shamelessly admit that this one is kind of a guilty pleasure, because angsty h/c is my comfort zone. Indulge me, all right?
Thanks to kanarek13 for a first sanity check and frith_in_thorns for the beta. Please do not share or upload this fic anywhere without the author's permission.
Musical Accompaniment: I recommend listening to Jorane's "Ineffable" while reading this. It's wonderfully, depressingly sad, and I think the overall atmosphere of the song reflects David's state of mind very well.

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"David?" Jill asked into the silence of his loft, and was greeted only by the hollow sound of her voice bouncing off the white-washed walls. The door fell into the lock behind her with a soft click and a feeling of dread found a home in the pit of her stomach.

"David?" she tried again, stepping into the dimly lit kitchen.

Her eyes searched the empty room and glided to the door. And there he was, out on the patio, a lone silhouette against the distant pinheads of city lights scattered across the otherwise dark sky.

The frigid autumn air caught her off-guard as she opened the door. The steady drizzle had increased in strength and instantly added a layer of wet sheen on the skin of her face. Even from here, she could see it in the hunch of his shoulders—and the knot in her stomach grew ten-fold.

He'd called her earlier, more composed and coherent than she would have been. Lilith had been in a car accident. After the emergency surgery, there was cautious optimism, but not a whole lot of it. She was in a coma, and no one had wanted to warrant any kind of long-term prognosis. Words like "stable condition" weren't all that reassuring.

After the initial shock, she'd told him she'd come, but he'd told her not to—practically shouted at her. And she didn't even know why she'd relented. But the hours had dragged on, and he wasn't answering her calls. Finally, she knew she couldn't idly stand by any longer.

And now, seeing him out here in the rain without even a jacket on, she cursed herself for not coming sooner.

"David," she said softly, and she wasn't sure if the fact that he didn't react was because he'd not acknowledged her or because he didn't want to.

She stepped closer, saying his name again. A flicker of a shift in his stance told her he was aware of her presence. Her hands came up, gently touched his upper arms, and the fabric of his shirt was wet and his skin too cold underneath it.

"Jesus, David," she whispered. "You're freezing. Let's get you inside."

She was surprised that a little gentle tugging was enough to persuade him to go back into the warmth of the apartment, and she steered him to the couch. As she took off her own jacket, damp from the rain, she couldn't help but guardedly watch him. He hadn't said a single word, was just sitting motionless with a blank expression on his face—and that frightened her more than anything. She'd seen an angry David Sandström, a livid, swearing, irate David Sandström. But this—a quiet, defeated David Sandström—was scary as hell.

Instantly, her brain kicked into methodical overdrive. She needed to get him dry and warmed up, there was no telling how long he'd stood out there. In the bathroom she found a clean towel, and stepping back into the living room was surprised to find that he had awoken from his catatonic rigor.

There was a certain frantic desperation to him rummaging through one of the living room cupboards, and she couldn't help but ask, "David, what are you doing?"

He opened another cupboard, pushed some of the items inside around. "Where the fuck is it?"

"Where is what?"

He spun around, his face contorted in barely contained emotion, his voice raised. "Is there no fucking drop of alcohol left in this place?"

"You threw all that out, remember?"

"No, I don't fucking remember. I just need— I need a goddamn drink, all right?!"

"David."

"Don't fucking *'David'* me," he shot at her. "I don't need any of your lecturing, patronizing bullshit right now."

She tried not to blanch, tried not to let it get to her. This was his defence mechanism at its best. God knew, she'd had to deal with it often enough, but seldom this fierce, this stinging. It was hard to tell what the best strategy was to meet his tirade—he was unpredictable at the best of times.

Still, her gut feeling told her that right here, right now, offence was the best defence.

"Fine, get pissed out of your mind and drink yourself into oblivion, if you think that's gonna make you feel better. Here," she handed him a ceramic bowl with the last remnants of what looked like potato chip crumbs, "Throw some inanimate objects while you're at it, see if that's gonna do anything for you."

He snatched the bowl from her hand and threw it across the room. It squarely hit one of the pillars and shattered into pieces before it hit the ground.

The silence that followed was louder than words, and Jill just looked at him as his eyes fixed on the mess on the floor.

"Shit," he hissed.

"Yeah," she confirmed, her voice not betraying the somewhat misguided provocation she felt bubbling up inside her. "Wanna throw something else?"

"No, dammit, I don't wanna throw anything else!" he raised his voice again. "I just wanna..." He grabbed the nearest object within reach, which was a candleholder that he hurled across the room. The "Fuck!" that accompanied it was loud and angry and desperate and damn near broke her heart.

She crossed the room in a few quick steps, grabbing a hold of his wrists before he could do more damage. "David," she said decisively. "Stop!"

"Don't tell me to stop," he said through clenched teeth, trying to worm out of her grasp, but she held on tight.

"Please stop," she said again, squeezing his wrists, fighting his resistance. "David, stop it!" she said louder.

He suddenly went slack in her grasp, and there was the defeat again. He raised his head, and in the second their eyes met, even in the dimness of the room, the pain and the anger was right there on the surface, spilling over without restraint.

Her brow creased in sympathy, and she wished she could take on some of his pain. And maybe she could. " Here," she said gently but decisively, emphasizing the command with a touch to his arms. "Sit down."

The way he faltered and sank down was as if he was suddenly devoid of any energy. Before picking up the towel she had dropped onto the armchair, she took the tartan blanket that was crumpled in a heap by the foot of the couch and placed it around his shoulders. Unfolding the towel, she knelt before him and started drying his hair.

The fact that he let her, quietly, was disconcerting enough. Willing her strength into the motion of gently rubbing his head, the silence of the apartment enveloped them.

"That should do it," she finally said in a low voice, leaning back on her heels, putting the towel aside. "Let me make you some tea, get you warmed up."

His whisper almost startled her. "I can't lose her, Jill."

"I know," she said in a soft voice, placing her hands on his thighs. "And you won't."

"How do you know?" His eyes sought out hers, looking for an answer.

"She's a fighter. She'll make it."

He closed his eyes, and when they opened again, she saw unfamiliar tears shining in them. She didn't think she'd ever seen him cry.

"Hey," she said, cupping his cheek with her hand, her thumb brushing against the three-day stubble.

It was both a relief and a shock to feel him crumble in her hands, and it was almost instinctive to guide him into an embrace with a soft touch to the back of his neck.

There were no words, no shushes of comfort. He didn't move, didn't sob, didn't tremble. His chest rose and fell in even breaths, and they stayed like that for a long time, her thumb stroking up and down his skin, his forehead resting in the crook of her neck.

Finally, he pushed out of the embrace, leaning his head back. He drew in a deep, cleansing breath, drawing a weary hand across his eyes.

Jill was unsure what to do. Squeezing his knee before pushing herself into an upright position, she said, "Why don't you change into some dry clothes?"

He slowly nodded and got up. In one of the kitchen cupboards, she found some herbal tea that she poured both of them a mug of. He joined her in the kitchen, his hair still damp but wearing a new set of clothes.

Steam billowing from the two mugs on the table, her eyes searched the kitchen counter. "You got any sugar?"

"Cupboard on the left," he told her as she sat down at the table.

There was only the clanging of her spoon against the wall of the mug for what felt like a small eternity. It was finally broken by a statement from David.

"I should be there."

"There, where?"

"With Lilith."

"Isn't she in BC?"

"Yeah, she's... Fuck, I should have gone."

"You can still fly out tomorrow."

He just nodded and Jill asked, "Is there any news?"

"They said she wouldn't be conscious for at least another twenty-four hours. They put her into an induced coma, said she—" His voice broke, but he quickly composed himself, taking a sip from the tea. "It's gonna be a while before she regains consciousness and—"

The sudden, shrill ringing of the telephone made both of them startle. Jill was up first. "I'll get it."

David looked at her with an expression between expectation and worry, and visibly relaxed at hearing her say, "Hi, Carlos."

She watched David rub his temples with his elbows propped up on the tabletop and went into the living room to answer Carlos' questions, reassure him that David was all right. All these years, and the men were still friends. As much of a pain in the neck as David could be, he had a way of worming his way into your heart. She knew all about that.

Their conversation was short, and upon Carlos' request, she went back to the kitchen, holding the phone out to David. "You wanna talk to Carlos?"

He shook his head and Jill relayed the message.

The phone gave off a short beep when she put it back in the docking station in the hall, and on her way back to the kitchen, she briefly stopped in the doorframe.

David's stance was familiar, hunched shoulders, hands buried in his hair. But this wasn't the usual pose of intense thinking, of contemplation of a problem. It was sheer despair and sorrow. The picture was hard to fathom. This was David frickin' Sandström, a boulder in any storm, no matter how fierce the onslaught. And that made it hit home.

Jill drew in a breath, walked to stand behind him. She softly let her hands find his shoulders, squeezing just a little. She could feel him leaning into the touch, relaxing ever so slightly, but it didn't take long for the tension to be back.

"It's been a long day. You should really get some rest," she told him.

"Spare me the fucking platitudes," he huffed sarcastically, raising his voice. "Like I'm gonna sleep while my daughter fights for her life in the ICU."

"David," she sighed, swallowing down the 'I didn't quite mean it that way,' that it implied.

"I need to go to the lab," was his response

"The lab? Why?"

He got up from the chair. "I can't take this. I need to do something."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," he shot at her. "Figure out why there's a cluster of chickenpox related deaths in Northern Alberta. Sequence the *Trichodorus obtusus* genome. Find a goddamn cure for cancer. Anything."

"It's almost midnight."

"So what if it's fucking midnight!" he spat.

"You seriously wanna go to the lab now?"

"What—was I not making myself clear?"

"David, you're exhausted, you're not thinking straight."

"Jesus, Jill. You sound like my fucking ex-wife."

She drew in a breath, raising her hands in defeat. "Okay, fine. Go knock yourself out. I don't even know why I entertained the notion that you might listen to reason in the first place."

Jill grabbed her jacket from the sofa's armrest and briskly walked away. She turned around just shy of the door to the hallway, trying to make her voice sound more neutral than she felt. "I'll be at home if you need me. And please— Please call me if there's any news."

She didn't dare look back and the door fell into the lock with a soft click behind her, the big metal A mounted on the wall mocking her in the dim light from the overhead light bulb.

"Shit," she hissed. She hadn't meant to walk out on David. How could she have walked out on him? Immediately she felt guilty; upset with herself at letting him get to her. Again. His damn ego, it was just so hard to deal with.

But it was too late now. Too late to turn back, and she knew he would have just walked away if she hadn't walked out on him first. With a sigh, she took off down the stairs and got in her car.

She'd barely turned the key when her cell phone rang. The name in the display said, 'David'.

"Hey," she greeted him carefully.

"Come back," he simply said, and she could hear the plea and the gravely apology in his voice that he'd never say out loud.

"Okay," she answered.

There were few words when he let her back in the apartment, and suddenly his lips were on hers, soft and longing. The way to the bedroom was short, the sheets unruly from the night before. Their lovemaking was neither frantic nor laden with the usual energy. There was a certain desperation in the way he sought the physical contact, and she let him.

Afterwards, they lay in silence, the sheets wrapped around their bodies, the dim light from the streetlamps spilling in through the windows.

It was Jill who broke the silence. "Do you want me to come with you to BC?"

"No, I'll go alone."

"Are you sure?" she probed.

He was quiet for a long moment. "Why would you want to come with me?"

"Because you shouldn't be alone."

"She's *my* daughter, Jill."

"And I would be there for *you*, not for her. Well, no, that came out wrong. I would... You know what I mean."

"No, I *don't* know what you mean."

"David, you've been taking care of everyone else for as long as I can remember. No one ever takes care of you. Maybe it's time someone did."

"Wow," he said sarcastically. "That's really profound."

"Jeez," she sighed. "Why is it impossible to have any kind of serious conversation with you?"

"Because then the world would unhinge and the universe would implode."

"Is that a theory based on scientific fact?"

"I don't know, I'm not a fucking astronomer."

She lay quiet for a while, then asked, "So you'll let me come with you?"

"Since when have I ever been able to stop you from doing anything you've set your mind to?"

She smiled to herself in the dark. That was as close to a yes as she would get from him. She turned to lie on her side and closed her eyes.

Just like always, there was little physical contact afterwards. He just wasn't the cuddling type, and she knew he valued his space in bed when they weren't having sex.

"Good night, David," she mumbled.

She could hear him grunting something next to her as her mind drifted to that state of surreal semi-consciousness just before sleep. It could have been anything from "Good night," to "Shut the fuck up," to "I love you."

You never knew with David Sandström. And if it wasn't driving her absolutely crazy most of the time, it was also what she loved so much about him. And maybe it would be enough to stay with him for good.

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THE END.