

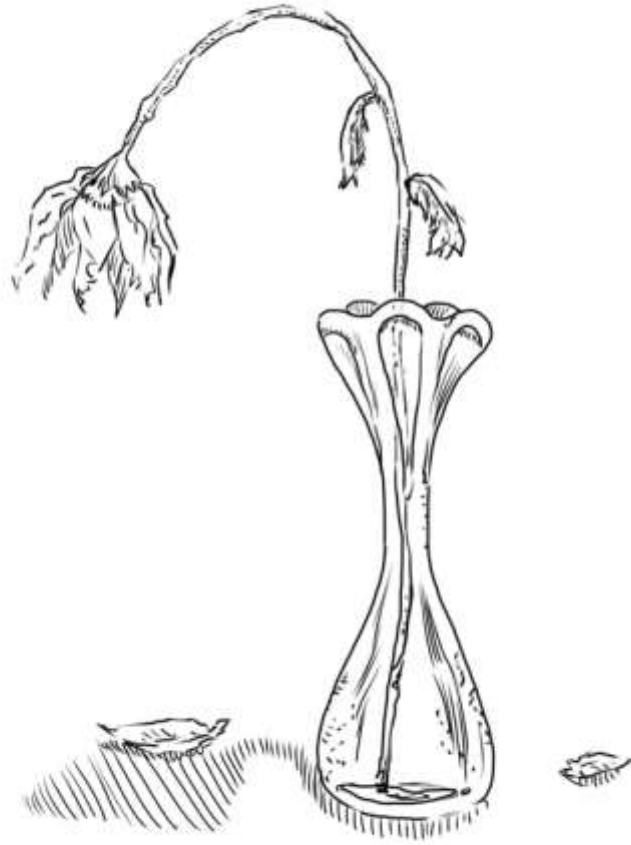
The Little Merman

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“In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all...
Perfect relief is not possible, except with time.
You cannot now realize that you will ever feel better...
And yet this is a mistake.
You are sure to be happy again.”

-Abraham Lincoln



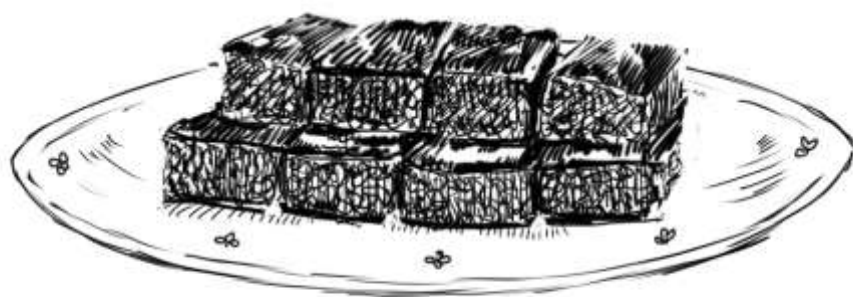
Prologue

Robert was standing in front of the mirror. He was staring at his ash-like hair, his wrinkled face and dark, dead eyes.

In fact, Robert did not know much about it, falling in love. Maybe it happened to him before, but since it was too long ago, he had forgotten. He was wondering why it had happened to him so late.

He missed her. Just thinking about her took his breath away. His heart pounded every time he saw someone who looked like her. He often went to the place where he ran into her before, hoping to see her just once again. He was so in love with her. He couldn't tell anyone how he felt—they would just laugh and point fingers at him.

Robert felt miserably disappointed, because there was nothing he could do. But when the chance came in an unpredictable way, he grabbed it. He was not sure if it was a blessing or a curse, but he made his choice. It changed everything, or maybe the change started the moment he met her.



Ch1

There is a moment. A moment that you realize you missed something very important; when you have this realization, it is too late to change. You thought you had always known how important it was. You heard about it all the time from other people, books, television and movies, but yet you did not truly know with your heart how precious it was... until you lost it. After that moment you think, *Why have I not done anything about it? I should have done something!* But like I said, everything was too late. It is over. There is nothing you can do.

I wasted it. My one life. Drinking and stuck. Stuck in that stupid black hole of depression. I gave it all up that day. That day I went to the swamp. I ran away. Ran from the hurt, the pain, the numbness. When I stopped and looked back, there was nothing left.

-R-

The thunder storm was raging outside. It was windy, and the trees creaked with every gust.. It was a little after noon, but Robert was still asleep. The living room was dark. Beer bottles and trash were all over the place. The T.V was on. Some kind of travel show was playing. Robert was sleeping on his couch. *Knock, knock, knock.* He thought it was the sound of rain or a tree scratching his house. *Knock, knock, knock.* The second set of knocking woke him up. He was still not sure if he had a visitor or not; he had a hangover from yesterday. It was a familiar pain. He wondered,

What day is it today? Do I have to go to work? Oh, right, today is Saturday. Robert felt relieved.

Knock, knock, knock.

Who could that be? Robert rarely had visitors. He combed his hair with his hand, took his glasses off, and massaged his eyes. He slowly stood up and walked to the door. When he opened the door, it creaked. In front of the door, a young girl with dark brown hair was standing with a smile.

She was soaked from rain. Her green eyes glowed. “Hi. I am Sara Hale. I just moved next door,” she said brightly.

“...Ok.” Robert nodded. She immediately looked apologetic.

“Oh, I am sorry. Did I wake you?”

“You are...fine.”

“Well. Hi. I am Mrs. Olvermann’s granddaughter. “

Robert nodded without saying anything.

“Could you lend me your hammer?”

“Hammer?”

“Yes. The one with the remover on it. We have a problem with nails.” Sara was smiling and he started walking away. “Ok, wait for a minute.” Robert went to the garage. *Who was Mrs. Olvermann? That name sound familiar.* He tried to find the light switch in his garage. *Ah! The old lady who lives next door. She needed an ambulance the other day. She seemed much older than me’* He turned on the light in the garage. The garage was messy. There were many broken items. He realized that he broke most of the things when he was mad and drunk. “Shoot...” He cleared his way and tried to find the hammer. His claw hammer was in the back corner under the broken shelf. He grabbed it and walked back to the door.

“I will bring this back as soon as I’m done,” Sara said with a smile. Robert just nodded and closed the door. He came back to his living room and turned the DVD player on. ‘My Fair Lady’ started playing. He had seen this movie so many times, but he liked the classics. He smiled when he saw Eliza on the screen. *Tap, tap tap...* The sound of rain came through the windows.

Knock, knock, knock. He thought this had happened before. He wondered if he was dreaming.

Knock, knock, knock!

Yeah, right, someone came. That smiling girl. Robert realized, half asleep. He went to the door. The rain had stopped and it was sunny outside. Robert opened the door and Sara was standing with the hammer and a plate of brownies.

“Here is the hammer. Thank you so much. Mr...?”

“It’s Mitchell, and you’re welcome.”

“Here. I made some brownies. Eat it with your family.”

But I don’t have family... “Thank you,” he said. He found that taking the plate was easier than explaining everything.

“Ok. Have a great day, Mr. Mitchell!” She chirped as she bounced away. Her hair was reflecting light in the spring sunshine. Robert closed the door and dropped the hammer in the corner. He put the plate on the table and sat down on the couch. The beer cans clanked. He took out the cans from the couch and dropped them on the floor. The movie was still playing.

He felt hunger. He stared at the brownies. He did not have a sweet tooth, but he grabbed one from the plate and took a bite. “Wow...this is sweet.” He reached his hand out and found a new beer can and opened it.

-S-

Sara was driving slowly and looking around carefully. She was driving near a pretty neighborhood, but it did not catch Sara's attention because she had to find her grandmother's house. The sky was getting dark and it started raining soon after.

"Western road 300 East...4439 south...I am pretty sure it was around here..." Sara mumbled to herself. She tried to remember where her grandmother's house was. She was following her GPS, when her phone ran out of battery. Katy Perry was blaring on the radio. Sara turned it off to concentrate. *I should've charged the phone.* Sara was a little bit frustrated, yet she was still smiling. She knew she would find it. When she turned the corner, she saw a familiar sight; her childhood memory flashed before her eyes. Even though it had been a while since she visited her grandmother's house, she could remember the neighborhood. Suddenly, she missed her sick grandmother and had tears in her eyes. Sara saw her friend Michelle standing in front of her grandmother's house, waving to her. "Michelle!" Sara exclaimed. She was so excited to see her friend, that she honked the car horn.

"Hey, your phone is off. I've been waiting forever." Michelle complained playfully.

"Why didn't you just wait in your car?" Sara replied.

"Because I figured you would be on time, and I was so excited to see you!"

"Me too, it's been ages since I saw you last," Sara replied with excitement. Sara ran to Michelle and the best friends embraced. Then began the normal routine at grandma's.

Sara went to the mail box, and opened it. There was a key in the back corner of the mail box. When she opened the door, Sara felt like her grandmother was in the house. It smelled like cookies. That scent brought back memories of Sara's childhood. Sara turned on the lights. There were many pictures of her family on the walls and tables. Some of them

were pictures of Sara. She looked around. It was a little bit different from her memory. She felt great peace and comfort being in the house.

“Wow, this house is so cute!” Michelle said entering the room with her luggage. “How is your grandmother?”

“It was serious at first, but she is a lot better. She is staying in the senior center now so she always has someone to take care of her.”

“Well, I am glad she is alright.”

“Yeah. She is a tough old lady. She’ll be fine. As soon as I move my stuff into my room, I am going to visit her.”

“I’ll go with you. By the way, I love these pictures.” Michelle looked around the living room.

“That is my mother.” Sara pointed to one of the pictures behind the couch.

“Oh, she is beautiful.”

“Yeah, she still is,” Sara said, walking up the stairs. “There are empty rooms; choose whichever one you like.” Sara walked down the hallway. Every place was filled with memories. *It is so great to be here. I can finally rest and forget everything.* She opened her grandmother’s room. It was well organized. She missed her. She opened the next door. There was a big window and Sara could see the back yard where was still raining. Searching the rest of the room pulled Sara away from the peaceful scene outside the window. The room had a desk, a chair and a bookshelf filled with old books.

“I call dibs on this room!” She called out to Michelle as she emerged from the closet. Walking out of the closet, something snagged her left shoulder. “Ow!” She checked her jacket, and luckily it wasn’t ripped. She saw the bent nail. “Hmm...” Sara tried to pull it out with her hand, but it didn’t move.

“I am getting you out of there; you can’t ruin my moving day!” Sara could just

ignore it, but for some reason she could not leave it alone. She tried to find where her grandmother kept the tools.

"I'm going next door to borrow a claw hammer," Sara told Michelle as she left the house. Sara looked around and found one house right next to her. *These houses are very close. They must know my grandma well.*

There was nothing in the neighbor's garden. Sara saw some dead plants in vases. She saw a small light through the window. It must be coming from the television. She knocked on the door and after getting no response, she knocked again. Sara was about to give up and move onto the next house, when the door opened slowly. An old man was at the door. He seemed like he was just waking up from a nap.

"Oh, I am sorry. Did I wake you?" Sara said.

"You are...fine."

"Well. Hi. I am Mrs. Olvermann's granddaughter." The old man did not say anything. Sara felt awkward. "Could you lend me your hammer?" Sara asked.

"Hammer?"

"Yes. The one with the remover on it. We have a problem with nails." Sara made her hand like a claw to show what she meant.

"Ok, wait for a minute." The old man brought the claw hammer, and she ran home and took the nail out from her closet.

"Yes!" The experience was gratifying. The nail was in the wrong place for a long time, but now it was gone. *This was just like me, but it's ok. It's all good now.*

She checked the clock. It was a little after noon. She unloaded her stuff from her car and recharged her cell phone. She came down to the kitchen and started baking brownies. Her grandmother baked brownies for her often, so she wanted to bake some and bring them to her in the senior center. After Sara finished unpacking, she saw the hammer on the desk. She

grabbed the hammer and went downstairs. She took out the brownies from the oven and put several pieces on a plate.

"Did you make brownies?" Michelle asked with a smile.

"Yes. I wanted to bring some to grandma."

"Are you leaving now?"

"Oh, no, this is for the neighbor." She showed the hammer to Michelle.

"Can I have some?" Michelle asked tentatively.

"Of course! Hey, you don't work today, right?"

"No. Tomorrow morninnn--." Michelle answered while she put the brownie in her mouth.

"Is the hospital far from here?" She asked after chewing the rest of the treat.

"Nope, it's close. That's one of the reasons why I moved here." Michelle put another piece into her mouth and smiled. When Sara opened the door, the rain had stopped and it was sunny, making her day suddenly so much better. Sara brought the hammer and brownies to grandma's neighbor. When she knocked, the same old man came out. She returned the hammer and gave him the brownies. She walked back to the house, and smiled, grateful for the joy she was feeling in that moment. Sara wasn't sure how long she was going to stay here, but she had a great feeling about this place and the choice she had made to come.



Ch2

I **don't remember** exactly when it was, but a long time ago, I took my children to the zoo. John and Hannah were so excited; they dragged me and their mom everywhere. I was so tired of chasing them, so I sat down on a rock. It was a hot day and I was sweating. I saw an elephant behind the fence, which made me think about his situation. If he was out in the wild, he could run freely, but he was locked up and sitting down on the ground. I wondered what he was thinking. *Does he remember running in Africa? Is he resentful toward the people who caught him? If he was born in the United States, has he ever seen Africa?* I felt like I could understand him. *What am I doing here? I am also locked up like that elephant. 'But I am the one who chose this. Did I really want this, or did I start a family because I wanted to be responsible for my mistake with Nancy?* "Robert! Come, hurry." I turned my head to Nancy and realization hit, *I don't love her...* I was not happy, so I did not smile.

-R-

The New Age Stock Company was placed near downtown Camas city. Robert's job was very simple, and he only had two years left until retirement. He was forcing himself to go to work. Often he looked outside of his window and drifted off into retirement world. Every day was the same. The work itself was not too bad, but when he was sitting alone in his office, a dark feeling filled him. It drove him crazy..

It was hard for him to deal with that feeling without pills. He swallowed his medication and exhaled. "Phew..." He sat down on his chair and leaned back. There were people going to lunch outside. They were talking about where and what to eat. He turned to the window and watched other people going out to lunch. His depression had increased, especially after his brother died; people stopped talking to Robert. Robert also had an alcohol addiction problem, and often he got warnings from his job.

At first, he forced himself to mingle with people to overcome his depression, but it did not work; it made him more upset. When he was young, he worked hard for the company. He gave everything to his job, but now, it was just a place where he had to go every day.

Robert was not sure if he was hungry or not. He kept staring out the window. There were people who were waiting to cross the intersection. One girl caught his attention; she looked familiar. She tied her dark brown hair and wore a pink shirt and tights. She had her headphones in and was jumping and dancing while waiting for the light. *Who is sh---? Right! It was the girl who borrowed my hammer last week, my neighbor's granddaughter.* Robert couldn't remember her name. It was hard to tell, but Robert thought she was smiling. *What makes her so happy...?* He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes. He put them back on and grabbed his jacket to go out.

When he got out of the building, he felt a cool wind. Now there were fewer people around. He walked to the park. He preferred the park with the sandwich cart rather than the cafeteria. When he ate alone, it made him depressed, but eating among many people, and realizing he was alone made it worse. He bought the turkey sandwich from the small sandwich shop and sat down on a bench. He opened the

package and leaned back. There were always old men playing chess, parents taking walks with their children or pets, and people exercising.

That could be me in two years. He watched the older men running past while he ate his sandwich. He shared some with the birds and then noticed something strange. When he turned his head, he saw Mrs. Olverman's granddaughter running. "Sara!" He remembered her name. She was running to Robert. When she came near him, she raised her hand and said, "Hi."

Does she remember me? He awkwardly waved back. She ran past Robert. He saw Sara saying hello to other people, too. *Of course not.* Robert was embarrassed that he had felt excited and took one more bite of sandwich. He looked in the direction that Sara had run. She had already disappeared. He thought it was weird how she said hello to strangers.

He usually got home from work a little bit after dark. There wasn't anything exciting after work. He came home and parked his car in the messy garage, running over miscellaneous items on the floor of the garage. He would clean it this weekend. He decided to be really careful not to break anything when he was drunk next time.

The living room was dark. No one was at home, only silence. He turned the lights on to find his cell phone on the table. Robert hadn't noticed he had left it, but that didn't surprise him. He hardly got calls. When Neal was around, he called Robert often. Robert missed his younger brother so much.

He turned on the T.V., his usual routine. The sound of the T.V. helped him to get rid of the silence at home. He couldn't handle the quiet. After making one of his usual microwave meals, Robert grabbed a few cans of beer and sat down on the couch. He did not like any particular show. He turned on anything and mindlessly sat

there until he fell asleep. When he woke up in the middle of night, which happened quite often, he watched classic movies. His favorites were ones that starred Audrey Hepburn. They were very old, and predictable, but he still loved them. He took another can of beer. Dr. Albert told him to stop drinking, but he didn't listen. Drinking beer instead of liquor was a lot of progress for him. He needed the alcohol, otherwise he couldn't sleep or keep it together.

A little after 9 o'clock, he had sunk deep into his couch. He was sleepy, and when his eyes were about to close, the sound of girls laughing woke him up. He could tell it was from right next door. Mrs. Olverman's house was very close. When Mrs. Olverman came out to her backyard he could hear her through his kitchen. He was not sure, but he assumed that the laughing was coming from their backyard. He realized there was more than one person living with Sara. He took a sip of beer and closed his eyes. While he was falling asleep he kept hearing the girls' voices. When he opened his eyes again, it was morning.

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