

the anglerfish



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“...I’ve got it all here in my heart. I want you to know, I know the truth, of course I know it, I would be nothing without you. ...Thank you, thank you, thank God for you...”

~from *The Wind Beneath My Wings*

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Prologue

It is an odd creature, the anglerfish, living in the deepest depths of the ocean at its floor. Its very life is built upon an intimate physical connection that begins when the male detects the scent of a female. He then bites onto his chosen one and as he holds on, his very skin fuses to the female anglerfish. From this point, their bodies grow together. They are even nourished from a shared food source. They are bonded for life, and the death of one becomes the fate of the other. The two fish are thusly mated for life. Separation becomes impossible because truly, they have become one.

We've heard it said that one cannot know the glory of love without its opposing emotion. But, do we need this or does it just become sweeter knowing its polar opposite. Surely those who've encountered loss would never prefer the visit, but gladly wish for knowledge without actuality. Love/hate, privilege/loss, life/death—can just the first of each pair inform us of the other? Does humanity require a portion of each measured out to all on this earth, or can we know both by understanding just the former?

We have all been visited by tragedy, and life has turned at times sour for each of us. No one leaves this world unscathed without a disaster to his name; beneath the surface of every soul on this earth, we need just scratch lightly and there pain will be found. The story is different, but oddly similar. Experiences come in numerous sizes, but they all mark our hearts with permanent ink and we are never the same.

Perhaps we are more akin to the deep-bottom fish than we suspect with their mundane yet miraculous life. They bond out of an innate primordial predetermination, and likewise we walk through our lives knowing the scab always follows the wound. Are sadness and serendipity measured out for teaching purposes, or can learning occur like the turning on of a light? Can we see peace without pain or feel

love without hate or know joy without tragedy? Or, are we merely left to ponder this great mystery until one day life transmutes us akin to the ancient and predictive

anglerfish.

Brownwyn recognized the sadness in Madelaine's eyes because it matched her own. This grief could be spotted...if one knew what to look for. "You have lost a child, too," is all she said, and the tears that flowed between them created an ocean of water not unlike the one separating their respective continents. But, unlike the enormous Atlantic ocean, this common out-flowing diminished the distance; and that gulf of class, economics, and skin color was reduced to a speck.

The two mothers cried shared tears for their losses as though there was only one. They cried as only mothers can; when words sound silly and inadequate, and water and flesh become sea and land, and time sits and refuses to march, because their destiny lies right in their very own hearts. They shared a moment that only twins can know, since each resides in the body housing the other. And it was as if their common ground stretched back for years, really tens of years, and the thread that held them and comforted them was knit in the fabric of their very creation.

They had known each other for mere minutes, but it had been a forever that only the soul can comprehend. Recognition of self in another took on the form of a small child looking into a mirror for the first time. And as each looked into the other's eyes, they knew that their bond was an eternal one and was not subject to questioning. But, as they searched for the pain they had clung to so desperately, they each recognized its receding in the other and in them. That well of pity and sadness each had sunk into was filling their heart with joy, the joy of a kindred soul.

There was no need to compare their respective sadnesses, for their memory cards were identical. Each had suffered terribly with the death of their only child and they would never be the same. But now, for whatever reason on earth, their lives would not only never be the

same, but they would be so much richer and wonderful in spite of their losses. And perhaps they would be richer because of their losses.

The deaths of their children would change them forever, certainly, but the melding of their hearts would erase the pain and increase the love they had ever known, exponentially. Neither would ever be able to explain what happened on that fated day on holiday; but each knew, as they had known when their child died, that their life would not move forward as they had known it—only now, the difference in this new life meant they had embarked on an incredible journey of love.

Death is expected in the elderly; for surely, it is the culmination of all of life on this earth. But, it should never occur in the precious days of childhood; especially not in your own child's.

Her divorce could have been anticipated perhaps, but for Madelaine, this inconceivable second tragedy pushed even her patient limits. The agony that would come is beyond the average mother's thinking. Yes, it is true that the death of a child pushes pain beyond tolerance, but usually this happens to someone else.

So, Maddy was poorly prepared when her precious Annika was diagnosed with the rarest of childhood diseases...little did she know that death usually follows this diagnosis. And unfortunately, it was accompanied by a treatment that would include hair loss, unusual hair-growth patterns, a constant queasy stomach, and lots of tears.

As any parent knows, watching a precious child go through such torment, they would always prefer to be the one so afflicted. But, fair can never be applied to life in this way; the innocent seem to suffer so. And as much as Maddy fought side by side with sweet, innocent Annika, there was little pain, little suffering, little relief she could intercept to unburden her two-year-old.

When Annika died just prior to her third birthday, her mother wished with all her heart to follow her into the harsh earth. But, wishing could not make it so....she was here to stay for awhile longer. She even prayed fervently for a lousy driver to pick her out of the cross-walk one day and send her along with Annika. Then there was the odd chance that her pain pills and one drink would not be tolerated by her stomach and end her life on this pathetic earth. She had no more will to remain among the living, because she was dead inside already. And

unfortunately, dead to living and anything that was a part of this earth, she would remain at least for now.

On the advice of very loving friends, she would take an extended holiday to the farthest point on the earth she could fly, where the English language was spoken. South Africa was somewhere where she would know no one and no one would know her. The pitying looks and sad eyes could accost someone else—yes, they meant well, but pity was not her favorite emotion.

Maddy just wanted to move on, so a trip to South Africa would do nicely. She would forget for a whole month that her life was now the stuff of sad novels. She was the wife who had lost her husband, her child, her life, and her very will to go on. Her life had no meaning now that her titles and nicknames had been erased: wife, mother, honey, and numerous analogous words no longer applied to her.

She had hoped that her broken heart would eventually turn on her and attack her very life but no amount of wishing sent her any closer to dying. Unfortunately, the pain became constant, living became unbearable, and her life became a poor substitute for death. So, it was time for a change of venue.

The airplane flights with their numerous connections were predictably long but welcomed. This was a further chance to escape those who would choose to invade her existence. It was easy to pretend she was sleeping when the questions invariably came: are you married, do you have children, what do you do? Because each time these questions came, the answers she supplied--no, she died, try to die--pushed Maddy further into her self-imposed exile. She was an observer in her own life, because to live it would mean she would have to acknowledge that her life wasn't over. Life just held no meaning for her since all she ever wanted to do or be was defined by the words, "wife" and "mother". And what do you do when you've been stripped of your credentials?

Maddy felt she was drowning and by stepping into an observer position, this allowed her to move forward. Unfortunately, she didn't move forward in the psychological sense, but only in the physical sense where putting a foot down time and again only literally propels one forward. There was no resolution or coming to terms with her life or the deaths she had encountered in it; she merely retrained herself to breathe, one breath at a time. Her mere existence was exhausting.

The plane ride additionally propelled her more quickly to the death she coveted and could not seem to accomplish. So each hop was relished: Los Angeles to New York, New York to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Johannesburg, Johannesburg to Cape Town, and finally Cape Town to George Airport. Unfortunately, not one of the planes crashed. She managed to sleep through the curious questions, and life propelled her forward at almost five hundred miles per hour closer to her life's final destiny.

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