

my father's name filled every page of my mother's, especially the earlier ones. She dreamed of living "happily ever after" with him.

His was a mechanic's logbook. 6 a.m. exercise, 7 a.m. breakfast, and 3 p.m. meeting.

She started out believing they were an exception, a rare case of actual, true love. Once they were married, reality hit. Endless cleaning, she did without complaint. Three meals a day, she cooked with no appreciation and plenty of critiques. A Ph.D. in chemistry, she sacrificed but supported him while he pursued his educational dreams.

Her thought of breaking free came too late. I, she said, killed her chance.

The Little Mermaid traded in her voice for legs just to tread on needles. A chemist, my mother withheld her career development to live under a life sentence of "unhappily ever after." She kept her voice but made no sound, had legs but never moved a step.



In high school, on one of my trips to the bookstore, I saw a copy of *Andersen's Fairy Tales*. I pulled it off the shelf, flipped to "The Little Mermaid," and read the whole thing sitting on the aisle floor in one breath.

The Little Mermaid didn't die. After jumping into the sea, instead of dissolving into foam, she rose into the sky and became Daughter of the Air. If she served good deeds for three hundred years, she would create an immortal soul for herself. Her fate no longer relied on the love of a man.

My hands trembled. Did my mother skip these last few paragraphs? Did I forget them, or block them out because of her relentless cynicism?

I wished that as a child I had known, through suffering and enduring, one could become independent of external forces. But even if she did read me the real ending, at that time, I wouldn't have seen the parallel between The Little Mermaid and my family.

I slid the book back onto the shelf and gave it one last, long look before walking away. I was supposed to focus on schoolwork.