

They'll never love you, only hurt you."

"A man?" I hadn't made the connection between the prince and an ordinary man.

"Yes, like your dad."

"I can't trust him?"

"That's not what I mean." She reached over to cup my cheek. "When you grow up, you'll meet men. Don't trust them. Never dream of true love from them."

"Does Dad love you? Do you love him?"

"Yes. But we're an exception."

I cried myself to sleep that night. Love was pain. Love betrayed. Love left the Little Mermaid in despair. She gave up everything and in the end? She didn't even get the prince.



Once, in middle school, when my father was out for the evening, I watched TV over dinner with my mother. A trailer for *Titanic* ran on the screen. Rose lay on a floating door, and Jack held onto its edge in the freezing water, their foreheads touching.

My mother frowned. "What do you think would happen if they both survived?"

"Get married?"

She rolled her eyes and pulled some rice into her mouth with her chopsticks. "No. Within two weeks, they'd go separate ways. The difference in their social classes would drive them apart."

I stopped eating, my bowl in midair. "But they loved each other. They'd find a way."

"Love is helpless before reality. Any attraction between a man and a woman is an illusion, a deception." She placed a piece of stir-fried pork on my bowl of rice. "It always comes with strings attached."

After chewing and swallowing it, I said, "What about you and Dad? You