

*From chapter three:*

Some time later, he looked around himself at the wonders of the sea floor, seeing things he hadn't noticed before. He wondered why he didn't feel cold or water pressure pushing down on him. Perhaps Tojet had created the undersea dreamworld of the merrows based on her own ideas, and not on reality. After all, she'd never been down there before. Neither had he, so he had no way of knowing whether or not the Atlantic Ocean bottom near Great Britain looked much like the picture before him now. If it was based on reality, perhaps the blue cap on his head did more than just let him breathe underwater: Maybe it allowed him to survive in that environment, by keeping him warm and removing the pressure of several atmospheres.

Below lay shades of darkness; near the bottom, almost half the light from the sun was gone. Medium-sized and small shapes moved in the seaweed in the eternal twilight along the mud and sand of the bottom. They included starfish, crabs, and small sharks. He'd never seen an ocean bottom up close and probably never would again. Catsharks skimmed the bottom. Schools of fish and even the occasional porbeagle shark passed by them. Did such a large (and dangerous to humans) shark belong in these waters? At first his heart speeded up, but as more and more creatures either ignored or moved around Merkit and the merrow, it calmed down. Were they intimidated by the hideous merrow, or did he taste so bad that even the sharks didn't want to eat him?

Gold and crystal palaces appeared in the distance.

"Who lives there?" Merkit said.

"Undines and nixes," the merrow said. "Take care, and don't let go of me here."

"Why?"

"Undines can only obtain a soul by marrying a human and bearing his child. Haven't you ever read *Undine* by Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué?"

A merrow reading human books? Merkit looked at the merrow in surprise, wondering how he'd gotten such a book. Oh, yes, this was a dream. It was so easy to forget these merrows were only images in it. He looked back. A woman floated right in front of him. He pulled up and tried not to hit her, but the merrow didn't stop soon enough. Merkit collided with the woman. It hurt only for a moment, until she smiled and stroked Merkit's hair. This young

woman, not a mermaid, was beautiful, with sea-blue eyes, blonde hair, and a long, white, lacy dress which floated around her in the waves.

“Come with me, man,” she cooed. “Be my husband.”

“He already is a husband,” the merrow said.

The undine glanced at the merrow, seeing him for the first time, and shrieked. She spun around and swam toward the palaces as fast as she could.

“I don’t know why undines get so scared of me,” the merrow said.

Merkit knew why the merrow would now forever appear in that poor water sprite’s nightmares, but he didn’t say anything. He just smiled and let the merrow lead him over the palaces, keeping the undines and nixes away with his ugliness but probably thinking it was with his strong, no-nonsense appearance. A little while later, they reached the surface at last. As soon as Merkit could wade to shore, the merrow asked to please have his cap back, and bid him farewell and good health. Merkit almost expected an “old chap” and “cheerio.” He smiled and turned to a waving, smiling, dancing Tojet on the shore.

*From chapter four:*

That night, Merkit heard a noise in the kitchen and went to check it out. Tojet was sleeping in her fairy dress (having promised to put it in the dirty laundry basket in the morning), and Barb was still asleep, so he was entirely alone. He picked up the medallion on the way to the kitchen: it might protect him from whatever he found. He didn’t know how or why it would, but since it was from Tojet, anything was possible.

A dish crashed in the divided sink. Merkit flipped on the light, and there, blinking at him from the sink, stood a pixie. His long, skinny body was green, his face like a hedgehog’s. A foxglove hat over his long, brown hair covered both head and neck and was about half as tall as he was.

“Greetings, Merkit.” He giggled.

“What are you doing in my sink?” Merkit said.

The pixie just giggled, flicking the faucet on and off and laughing at the streams of water. Several other fairies jumped out of the sink. Two were pixies, but the others were

human-featured children with butterfly wings. They wore pixie hats and grass tunics.

“At least it’s not ants in my sink,” Merkit said. “How do you know who I am?”

“Who else would Tojet give her other medallion to?” the first pixie said.

“She’s been carrying that thing around since it was made,” one of the children said. “She never went anywhere without it, because she knew she’d find you eventually. She made it for you.”

“Why did she?” Merkit said.

“It marks you,” another child said. “Now all the fairies can see who you are.”

He made a wry face, but his tone betrayed his good humor. “Oh, great. Will I get more visits like these?”

The fairies all giggled, the pixies sounding like children laughing out loud, the children like tinkling bells.

“Of course the fairies are more willing to show themselves to someone who believes in them,” the first child said. “That’s why people in this country don’t see much of us. And if we know you belong to Tojet, we’ll want to check you out, see if you’re kind to us and if you’re any fun.”

Merkit sighed. “So I’m the prime target.”

“We won’t hurt you,” the pixie said, turning on the faucet and playing in the water. “No fairy will hurt the one who’s been marked by Tojet. Even bad fairies fear that charmed medallion.”

One child picked up a small glass and played with it—until it fell over her. She banged her little fists against the sides. Merkit laughed and trotted over. The other fairies giggled and scattered into the air. One lit in his hair and tugged it. Merkit picked up the glass and put it back in the sink. The fairy child flew up to his shoulder and kissed his ear.

“You’re friendly,” she said. “We like you.”

Merkit tumbled down to the floor and sat there, laughing. He had wet pixies in his hair, a fairy on his shoulder, fairies in his sink, and a Celtic medallion in his hand. What more did a person truly need?

*From chapter five:*

One day in class, during the hour he'd set aside for teaching English, Merkit wrote sentences on the board to demonstrate subject, verb, and prepositional phrase. These sentences, which mostly came from a teacher's manual, also included one he'd come up with himself the previous year and written in the manual: "On what had seemed just like any other day, the little girl came upon fairies having a picnic."

This sentence incited a few giggles from the students, and a few groans because it was so complex that no one wanted to be the poor kid who'd have to go to the board and divide it up.

While proofreading his sentences, the phrase "just like any other day," similar to a line in his theme song, clicked it into his head. Memories of Tojet and Barb returned full force.

"Just like any other day," he muttered, wiping his eyes, which now filled with tears. His voice shaking, he turned to the class. "Um—Ashley, come to the board and do the first sentence."

Ashley grimaced, put down the pencil she'd been using to copy the sentences, got up from her desk, and trudged up to the board. Her light brown, bobbed hair bounced as she picked up a long piece of chalk, the longest she could find since all the students knew the long ones were best. She studied the sentence for a moment, then drew divider lines and labeled each section of the sentence with "S," "V," or "PP." She giggled at the "PP." Merkit wondered if that was the wisest choice over "prep." to show "Prepositional Phrase." He'd wanted to make things easier for the students, but instead he'd just made them more amusing.

Nine years old. They were all nine or ten years old, so of course they'd giggle at "PP." Tojet was nine and she would, too, if she knew that "PP" was also baby talk for "urine." He sniffed and wiped his eyes again.

Ashley turned to him. "Are you all right, Mr. Terjit?" she said, her green eyes wide. Green eyes—the same color as Tojet's.

"Um—yes, Ashley. Very—Very good. That is correct." He sniffed again. "You—may sit down now."

"Are you sure you're all right?"

The tears now streamed from his eyes. How could he break down in front of his class? He had to be more professional. Would they still respect him after this? His hand to his forehead, he whispered, "Go back to your seat, Ashley."

Chalk in hand, she wavered for a moment, then put the chalk in the metal holder and hurried back to her seat. "It must be about his wife," she whispered to her classmates.

Merkit took a breath but didn't turn around. "Class, I have to step out for a moment. Chris, you're in charge."

Chris, the most popular and responsible boy in the class, leaned back in his seat, crossed his arms, and smirked at the class.

Merkit hurried out and to the teachers' lounge, which, thankfully, was empty. He didn't come back to class until he'd calmed down and splashed cold water on his face. At least Chris had kept the other students from acting up.

A package of hard candy lay on his desk. This piece of contraband was the closest the students could come to a consolatory gift on such short notice. The giver, of course, never identified himself, and Merkit, of course, never asked.

The next morning, Merkit discovered the swing set had disappeared. Tojet had probably taken it somehow.

During these years, no matter how many times she tried to replace the clock in her classroom to keep the sad memory of Tojet out of her mind, Sister Elizabeth always had a backwards-moving clock. At last she gave in, and the time that had passed made the clock, the only tangible remembrance of Tojet, a comfort.

As the months passed in that lonely house, Barb kept returning to the mirrors of the house, and even came to the mirrorlike shiny surfaces in the kitchen sink and on the refrigerator and stove. It began to be a comfort, as if she'd never really left, but at times it was a torment, this untouchable image that never spoke or even smiled.

The months passed, and she visited less and less often. No fairies ever showed themselves. Eventually, even the cat died. Before calling the vet, Merkit sat and cried with loneliness and grief. Unlike many men, he preferred cats to dogs, and had been very attached to this one, especially after he lost both Barb and Tojet and had only the cat for company.

Tojet, who'd always wanted Barb's place, now tried to take it. Her image, her smiling, coquettish, elfin face, began to appear in the mirrors of the house. Sometimes she opened her mouth as if to tell another strange tale of her time travels, take him on yet another dream journey. He sometimes wondered if it really was Tojet, if she was playing a joke on him.

*From chapter twelve, when Tojet is eighteen:*

She appeared to him as he cleaned a classroom. She frowned. “Well, I did as you said and tried to be with Alfwine and forget you,” she said as her greeting. “You know what happened after a week? He told me I was no fun because I spent the whole time brooding about you.”

Merkit closed the classroom door so no one could hear their conversation. He went to her side, and she turned to him. He didn’t mean to be tempted, but her pout was so cute. A memory from the dreams flashed through his mind. He reached up to her face—no! He forced his hands down, and crossed his arms instead. Tojet missed nothing of it, and arched an eyebrow. That made things even worse. He groaned.

“What are we going to do, Tojet? This can’t work. Every time you’re near, I want to kiss you. I missed you so much over the past few years that I can’t just let you go away now that I’ve found you again, but we have to be platonic because I’ve made a decision to be a monk.”

“Did you do it just because you were sad about your wife?”

“No. They wouldn’t have wanted me here, if that were the case. It was one reason, but I thought long and hard about this, and I feel I may have a calling.”

“You *feel* you *may* have a calling? Why didn’t you just say confidently, ‘God has called me here’? Why did you have to think about it rather than just being drawn towards it by your desire and God’s call?”

Merkit stared at the floor for a moment. It needed sweeping. He looked into Tojet’s eyes. “I don’t know.”

She leaned toward him and put her head on his chest. “Why do you insist on rejecting me?”

He put his arms around her. “I’m not rejecting you; I’m rejecting romance. I don’t want to love again and just end up losing you. It took me a long time to even start to get over Barb’s death . . . and your disappearance. I don’t want to love again and go through that all over again.”

“Too late.” She looked up at him. All his resolve disappeared. He kissed her.

The doorknob moved and the door began opening. Tojet disappeared in the mist just

before one of the janitors walked in. He saw Merkit standing there, nowhere near his dustrag, his arms out in the air, and raised an eyebrow at him. Merkit swiftly crossed his arms.

“N-Nice day, isn’t it?” Merkit said, leaning back against a desk to gaze out the window.

“Mm-hmm,” the janitor said, turning away.

It was raining.

*From chapter thirteen:*

In the dim light of a hallway, the captors became visible: several goblins, some stern, and some laughing as if this were a game. They led and dragged their trophies into a large room filled with goblins.

The goblins reeked of sweat and dirt. Most of them had foot-tall bodies with long, skinny arms and large hands. Their often oversized heads had long and short noses, all knobby. Their faces had varying degrees of ugliness. Their eyes ranged from small and round to long and slanted. Unlike fairies, they all wore tall, conical hats and dark clothes, to Merkit’s relief: He didn’t want to know what their bodies looked like. As if the shapes of their limbs weren’t bad enough, the tops of their hands and heads were black or gray with hair. The bodies might have been just as hairy, if not worse.

“Look what we found!” one captor cried.

All the goblins turned from their seats on the floor to look.

“Tojet!” one said. “Bleegoo, you found the girl the fairies dote over.”

All the captors now grinned.

“This is even better than I thought,” Bleegoo said. “Take those handkerchiefs off their mouths, guys. I don’t think the fairy queen can hear them now.” He cackled.

As soon as hers was off, Tojet said, “I hope those were clean handkerchiefs.”

“Well, we didn’t blow our noses in them, if that’s what you mean, Miss Priss,” another captor said, “but I can’t vouch for them not being dirty.” He snorted.

Merkit said, “Da-kian, can’t you get free and then untie us?”

The whole roomful of goblins laughed.

“What?”

“Fairy powers don’t work here,” Tojet said. “We’re underground, in a goblin hill.” She hung her head.

“Well, can’t you get Yadea to talk to Hirkin?”

“How?”

“When he gets here, tell him to call in Yadea and you’ll have her plead for us. He’d probably give her anything she wants.”

“It might’ve worked, but Hirkin was the king of the goblins who lived near Silva, and he passed on centuries ago. This group has a totally different king.”

Merkit sighed. “That *would* be the case, wouldn’t it?”