

Lost Solemate

Once upon a time...

“Help!” is cried out.

A little gladiator sandal, no bigger than a walnut shell, collapses. It is exhausted from trying to leap out of a plastic bucket stored inside a closet. The sandal’s buoyant glow ebbs battered by a surging retreat. It angrily kicks at the clutter of crayons and colored pencils scattered everywhere.

Clearing a space and mustering the last of its resolve, the tiny sandal springs as high as it can, but it slides down the smooth wall despite its grasping. Desperate hope abandons the grieving sandal. Darkness matches the gloom in the sandal’s crushed heart.

“There’s got to be someone smarter than me to tell me what to do!” The sandal moans aloud in resignation, “Can’t anybody help me?”

“I can.”

The voice from behind the sandal nearly makes it faint.

With quivering hesitation, the sandal says, “Who...who are you?”

A large wizard hand puppet says, “I am someone who can help. All I needed to hear was for you to ask.”

“You were here all along?” the sandal asks incredulously, peering to see the wizard with only a hint of light coming from under the closed door.

“Yes. You’re part of that new toy doll aren’t you?”

“All I remember is being taken out of a box and given to a small child, who immediately started pulling everything off...and then I was thrown to the floor.”

The wizard reflects, “And later you also heard a voice saying, ‘Sweetie, pick up your doll’s things and put them away?’” The wizard looks at the sandal quivering in distress, “And here you are.”

Nodding yes, the memory clears away some of its fog. The sandal looks around the bottom of the bucket, exclaiming, “The other sandal isn’t here!” It collapses into uncontrollable sobbing, “I can’t go on without my solemate.”

The wizard looks compassionately at the sandal, and quietly says, “We all have times of grief. All of us suffer but it’s how we handle our suffering and what we do about it that makes our life better.” Pausing, the wizard soothingly offers, “And it’s too early to be giving up.”

Fatigue floods over the sandal. It slumps, laying back against a fuzzy, squeaky ball. “How can you help me? You said you could.”

“We must first get you out of here, then you can help me.”

Quietly snorting in disgust, “Help you! I can’t even help myself,” and adding despairingly, “Never could.”

“And that’s your problem. You are now all you need to be to solve this...and all your troubles in the future.”

The sandal shakes its head at this strange way of thinking, “What do I do?”

The wizard reaches out, “Take my hand. With my help, climb over me to the edge of the bucket and drop down to the other side. With the elephant hand puppet’s help, you two can push the bucket over so that I can get out.”

The sandal takes the wizard’s hand. It surprises the sandal with how big it is. Up over the wizard the sandal climbs until it looks over the side of the bucket. What it sees is frightening, “Oh, I can’t do this. I’ll get hurt!”

The wizard shakes its head resignedly, and says patiently, “See the elephant below?”

The sandal nods ‘yes’.

“The elephant will catch you in its trunk.”

The sandal’s resolve flees, “I... I ...I can’t.”

“Every freedom comes at a cost. It takes courage to be the sandal you want to be. Nothing better in life will come to you without you letting go of what you allow to hold you back.”

“If you say so.”

The wizard’s voice sharpens, “No! It is not if *I* say so, it is *you* who must decide *to do so*. Unless, of course, you want to remain unhappy in life forever.”

Closing its eyes, the sandal makes the leap down to the waiting elephant’s upraised trunk. The elephant catches and cradles the sandal, whose eyes brighten in wonder at the risk it just took. The sandal looks at the elephant, “We must knock the bucket over to free the wizard.”

Together, the two push against the bucket, which resists their effort until they shove it with all their might. It falls over spilling out the wizard, some crayons and the fuzzy, squeaky ball. The two hurry around the bucket to find the wizard waiting for them.

The wizard looks at sandal, “Now, little one. You must begin your quest.” To the elephant, the wizard says, “Thank you.”

“I can help some more,” the elephant offers.

The wizard smiles, “No my friend, you have done your work. There is no greater gift than freedom.”

The elephant waddles away, then pausing to look back to the sandal, "Good luck."

The sandal nods in appreciation.

"Come with me," the wizard says.

The sandal follows the wizard to the cat dish. With a finger stir in the water bowl, the wizard peers into the swirling for a vision. After a moment, the wizard says, "For courage, you will be joined by a tiger, for a brighter disposition you will be with a parrot, and for grace through life's obstacles, the monkey will help you...if you can keep up with it." The last was said with a chuckle.

"Come with me," growls a menacing voice behind them.

Sandal turns to find a tiger hand puppet in its face.

"Don't eat me," sandal whispers, attempting to be funny.

The thought pinches the tiger's mouth in disgust, "Yuck." The tiger winks at the wizard. To the sandal, "Follow me."

The sandal hurries after the tiger to a strange room.

Suddenly, they stop. A tabby cat sleeps curled into a ball on a couch near them. Even the tiger hesitates. The tabby is much bigger than the two of them many times over. They backtrack quietly until they enter another room.

The sandal has its hand over its heart. The tiger looks questioningly at it. The sandal whispers, "I have some heart trouble."

"No such thing...only a troubled heart," the tiger replies. "When you get rid of the old beliefs of who you're not...what you can't do...and make new memories of who you really are...like bravely jumping off of one of life's edges...then you'll have all the courage to do anything your heart says for you to do."

The sandal challenges, saying, "You were scared in there, like me."

"Not scared...cautious. Bravery doesn't mean doing stupid things, and it does mean knowing your limitations," the tiger offers. Then, listening closely to the air around them, the tiger says, "Time for you to fly."

Mugging, the sandal says, "Yeah, sure."

Then before the sandal can say more, a parrot hand puppet lands on the tiger. In a bright, blinding flash, the tiger vanishes leaving only the parrot. Stammering, the sandal asks, "Who are you?"

"I am here to teach you to lighten up...reach for the sky...to be free," the parrot mimics the wizard's voice, and smiling, "and be a little less drab than you are." Winking at the sandal, "Just look at me."

The parrot is quite right. With a yellow beak, green head with red eye accent and gray body, the parrot is a sight to be seen. "Here, touch my wing," the parrot says.

Suddenly the two of them are flying from room to room. The sandal has never seen such sights. The tabby cat still sleeps on the couch. Fish dart in an aquarium around air bubbles, chandeliers whizz by their heads making the sandal gasp, magazines are scattered about on a coffee table, and room lamps loom ahead everywhere. The parrot laughs.

The parrot flies into the kitchen and alights on a bowl overflowing with a variety of fruit. "Look here," the parrot says, "red cherries, green apples, oranges and gray skinned blueberries!"

The sandal looks at the parrot questioningly.

Emboldened, the parrot says, "Eat these everyday like I do and you'll be colorful like me!"

"But I don't eat...anything...ever," whispers the sandal.

This insight takes the parrot by surprise, then it says, "Not to worry. Got just the place for you." And with that, the two fly out of the kitchen and down hallways. The sandal laughs with delight at the world below that it has only been able to see looking up.

In and out of rooms they flutter to the cheering of the sandal. Finally, they end up in the laundry room. Hanging on an umbrella form clothes rack are drying tee-shirts, socks and underwear. The parrot alights upon one of the top cords where a set of tiny socks with a menagerie of shapes and colors are hung.

The sandal struggles to control its fear as it shifts its balance precariously on the cord, nearly falling off. The parrot looks at the sandal questioningly and says, "Remember, with me you can fly."

With that, the sandal relaxes and immediately settles on the rope cord. The parrot takes the two tiny socks from the line and it flies them to a table. "Here, put one on."

The sandal slides one of the socks inside its form, and in the reflection of a glass door window it sees itself. It is stunning. The sandal beams as it pirouettes to admire itself from many angles. Then it starts to dance but stumbles. It needs the other sandal. Inspired, the sandal makes the second tiny sock its partner and they slow dance.

"How's that?" the parrot asks. "Okay," the sandal replies, "but I have to hold it up and I want both of us to be free to swing and jump."

Smiling, the parrot says, "Since you want to jump about...," the parrot's voice trails off. Suddenly as before, a bright flash of light makes the sandal squint. And in that second, the parrot vanishes as a monkey hand puppet appears. "Jump you want," the monkey says, "jumping you will do." "But remember," the monkey continues, "always trust your instincts, especially when you are uncomfortable. Follow your heart and stop saying you can't do stuff." Pausing to inspect the sandal's face, the monkey asks, "Exciting?"

The sandal's face beams, "I've never known it could be this way," the sandal confesses, "I never want to go back to the way things used to be. I want to dance and dance all day!"

With that, the monkey smiles as it takes hold of the sandal, clutching the socks, and they leap wildly into space swinging from curtain to curtain. The chandeliers and ceiling fans are wonderful platforms to scamper around rooms. All the excitement awakens the tabby cat into a monster of hissing and snarling. It pursues them from below, clawing up at them, as they leap from each ceiling fixture. The sandal clings desperately to its precious cargo of tiny socks, though wishing its hands were freer.

The family dog is aroused by its hated rival, the tabby cat. Between the dog's growling and the cat's snarling, the room resonates with primal danger. A male voice booms from another room, "Stop that now!" The dog cowers and the cat scurries under the sofa.

The coast is clear for the monkey and sandal to drop to the floor and they bound into the room with the wizard. When they find him, the monkey disappears in a burst of light.

The sandal radiates such joy that the wizard cannot help but be pleased. "How do you feel now?" the wizard asks.

"Wonderful! But I'm still...without my solemate." The sandal holds up the colorful socks and says, "I've got one of these to share, but..." and the sandal's voice trails off.

"I have a suggestion," the wizard offers.

"What?"

"We'll both sit quietly and reflect back on that traumatic day. By going deep into stillness, you will remember more details that will help you now."

"Okay."

"Trust this process," the wizard says calmly, "it will always work for you."

The two sit and close their eyes. The wizard's breathing is especially pronounced, and the sandal cannot help but to match it as it grows deeper and slower. Their breaths are serene.

The sandal suddenly opens its eyes, "I remember now! The child threw the other sandal under that bed over in the corner there!"

The wizard smiles, "Why don't you look?"

The sandal hurries over to the bed and crawls under it. Sounds of joy burst out from both sandals being together again. When they emerge, they wear the tiny colorful socks inside their forms. Their delight is unbounded, and they dance joyfully around the room.

They are never parted again.